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NG HEAVEN

by RALPH FOX

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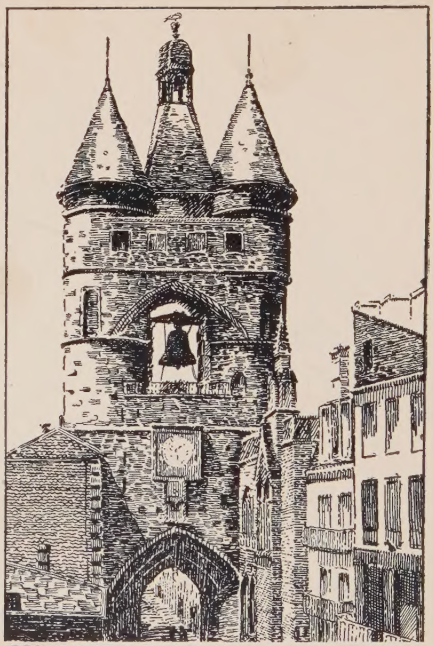

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To My
Husband Abe
From your
Wife, Eva.

STORMING HEAVEN

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STORMING HEAVEN

By RALPH FOX

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Author's Note

THE political divisions of the former Russian Empire were in 1922 a little complicated. The eastern provinces of Siberia, between Lake Baikal and the Pacific, were then an independent democratic Republic, with its capital at Chita, and known as the Far-Eastern Republic. Vladivostok did not form part of this Republic, but was ruled by an anti-Bolshevik General called Ditrichs, the former Commander of the Russian troops at Salonika. Till the autumn of 1922 Vladivostok was also occupied by the Japanese, under whose protection Ditrichs ruled.

At the time when John arrived in the Pacific seaport the Japanese were preparing to evacuate, leaving behind only the scars of their occupation, which at one time had covered the whole of the huge Amur province. By the end of 1922 Vladivostok, together with the Far-Eastern Republic, had become part of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic), as the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics was then called.

Readers who are not ethnologists must not be confused by constant references to "Turkish speech" and "Turkish peoples" into thinking that the Bolsheviks, already accused of so many crimes, have also annexed the Turkish Republic. Such an action would hardly have passed unnoticed by Lord Birkenhead and Mr. Winston Churchill. No, the truth is that the majority of those inhabitants of Asiatic-Russia generally loosely referred to as Mongols, or Tartars, are neither, but the ancient nucleus of that great Turkish race of whom the Osmanlis themselves are but an impure branch.

LONDON.
June 26th, 1927.

BOOK ONE: THE WANDERER

Part One

THE PACIFIC—EAST COAST

CHAPTER I

On the American shore of the Pacific there is a wide, blue bay, around which the land curves in a green circlet fringed by yellow sand, rising southward at one point to a high bluff. In the memory of living men there was a time when only camp fires burned upon that bluff, and the red horseman alone gazed from it at the declining sun.

But the majestic horseman has passed away, supplanted by pioneers from the East, who bound the continent with steel rails and built a town upon the edge of the bay from whence their ships passed out in search of trade and the riches of Asia.

Man's mind does not move easily, being bound by the forces at his disposal, and the naked Indian who seemed so magnificent and free, seated upon his shaggy pony, gazing from that high bluff over the sea, was in reality bound within the dark and narrow circle of his tents and tribal taboos. He saw no farther over the sea than his flimsy canoe could carry him, and he comprehended little more of the land than the beasts which he hunted upon the inland plains.

So the pioneers, too, moved only within the bounds of their comprehension and the town which they built made a dark blot upon one side of the bay. From the warehouses and shipping rows of untidy houses straggled northwards in uncomfortable proximity, the homes of the sailors, the dockers, and the workers in the elevators and

factories; while southward this dirt and uncared-for disorder was disciplined into high blocks of offices, shady tree-lined boulevards of white shops and cinemas and restaurants. Along these broad avenues the street-cars clanged more cheerfully, and automobiles, sleek and perfect, awaited their masters. Beyond the centre of the town again were dotted tiny villas, half Spanish, half fantastic creations of the pioneers' children, where lived the clerks, accountants and managers. Then there was a wide space over which a great white motor road swept out to the bluff, and there high above the sea rose the palaces of the conquerors, sons and grandsons of the pioneers, supplanters of the native red man.

There were many of these beautiful palaces, so hid among their groves of evergreen that sometimes they could only be noticed when from the sea the sun flashed liquid fire upon their windows.

From the bluff the masters, the millionaires, could look upon the town which was theirs, or over the Pacific till the dark line of the horizon stopped their restless eyes. But these men had won knowledge and knew that Asia was beyond, Asia which they coveted, with its riches, its millions of mankind, who could create for them wealth and cities undreamed-of yet.

Though these men were conquerors, with knowledge and ambitious dreams, their lives, just as much as the Indians', moved within the strict limits of their conditions. All their knowledge and dreams were built upon the fact that many thousands toiling to create wealth for them were themselves forced to live in poverty. Since this was a shifting, unstable condition, the millionaires so ordered their lives that they might ignore it. They worked in their airy offices, were carried about in their swift machines, played golf and tennis with their women according to certain strict rules, ate and drank and watched plays or films according

to other rules, and even, since they lived upon its shore, sported according to certain rules upon the unruly sea itself. Paths led down the bluff to golden bathing beaches, and their graceful yachts lay anchored nearby in the southern roadstead.

Equilibrium was not always maintained between the various parts of the town. Sometimes an intruder from the poor quarters burst upon the middle villas, or more rarely penetrated to the high aloofness of the bluff. Then there were consequences sometimes tragical, sometimes comical, sometimes tragical-comical, but always in the nature of a struggle before the intruder was overcome or absorbed, and order re-established. On the whole, however, the workers lived their lives of poverty with indifference, or occasionally with smothered hate, the middle and higher classes moved unchangingly within their circles, and only the sea was wide, and waited and laughed.

CHAPTER II

On a summer afternoon in 1921 the sea curled lazily warm and blue, along the sands of the bathing beaches. Its mood was youthful and it seemed to laugh deliciously as it lifted a naked boy on its bosom for a moment and then drew back, leaving him sunning on the damp brown sand. The boy, who was John Johnson, got up and ran to a rock where his shirt and trousers and shoes lay. His body was muscled and graceful, like a young animal's. The skin was a darker shade than normal and burned with the sun, and as he ran the sand seemed to dance from beneath his swift ankles.

Once at the rock he lay down, drinking in the sun through every pore of the youthful body, and it was clear that the tangled black hair shaded eyes that were the colour

of pools which the tide has left in the rocks, and that his lips curled with a defiant fullness. His beauty was born of a rare conjunction, for his mother was an island woman from beyond the horizon, his father a wandering English sailor.

It was not the first time John had left the dirty sand patches of the harbour-side, or the oil-spotted water that runs between the wooden piles of the jetties, to seek peace and enjoyment on the sacred beaches of the millionaires. So intent was he on drinking in the fullness of his stolen pleasure, he did not notice that from behind a black rift of rock at the foot of the bluff four young millionaires, two boys and two girls, had appeared. They were in bathing costumes, the girls wearing many-coloured cloaks and the boys brilliant dressing-gowns. When they saw his naked impudence sunning itself beneath the boulder they stopped short and cried out in angry amazement.

John heard them and by a quick turn of the head saw they were young and rich and of the class he despised as incapable of fight. The habit of such was to summon some high-nosed servant and so give one time for leisurely and derisive retreat. So he rose, and rudely showed them his false face as he stretched one hand for his shirt.

But he had misjudged. The elder boy, a peevish-mouthed, freckled youth, ran forward and cried angrily: "You little scum, there's ladies here."

John's gesture had provoked attack, so dropping his shirt he prepared to meet it, though the two boys were bigger than himself.

As he moved to engage he heard a girl's voice in shrill disgust: "Oh! Janey, he isn't even wearing drawers!" And it struck him that these two girls were wearing one-piece costumes, which were forbidden on city beaches. Then the fight was on, and too stern for further thought.

The young swells were hampered by their gowns, and

John, hardened by many tough battles in the slums, was just holding his own. Then one of the girls clawed at him and in a flash he saw that in this reinforcement was his means of escape. Skilfully he led the fight away from the rock, not without hurt, for the two boys struck shrewdly, and then watching his chance he gave an opening for the girl to claw again at his tangled curls. As she took her chance he slapped her a ringing box on the ear that made her step back with a howl. He turned at once and ran to the rock where lay his clothes. As he had foreseen, the swells left him for a moment to tend the crying girl before starting in pursuit.

When they came on again, panting and hot for vengeance, it was too late. John, shoes in one hand, shirt and pants streaming from the other, was a streak along the sands, swift in flight as an antelope. He turned once to call no good to them and then with slackened pace passed beyond their reach.

Back near the harbour, clothed again, he sat down on an upturned scow to meditate upon the limitless folly of the wealthy. What contempt could be deep enough for those who would drop a lusty fight, forget insult and hot revenge, for the cry of a pampered girl? He had calculated well, and though he rubbed a smarting ear and felt their bruises on his ribs he was content.

Content enough to want to smoke, so he rose to look for his friend Pete Mason and tobacco.

CHAPTER III

PETE was at his usual place, sitting on O'Donell's wharf and gazing morosely at a naked stoker on the fo'c'sle of a coaster, who was bending over a bucket washing away his grime.

He did not answer John's greeting, nor did he offer him a cigarette, but continued to gaze at the stoker busily soaping his hairy torso. As he watched he whistled, but through pursed and brooding lips.

John did not remember seeing him so glum since the day the Eighteenth Amendment came into force and Gallacher's saloon behind the Custom House closed down.

For Pete by nature was a gay, self-confident man, with a look in his quick brown eyes that made girls think of their lipsticks and men of their guns. Almost a swaggerer.

John did not suffer this silence for long, since Pete was his best friend and he had a right to expect sympathy and a smoke from him.

"Pete," he said exultingly, "I had a fight and licked two swell kids over at the bluff. Give us a smoke. I got an awful sore ear."

"Swell kids? Millionaire kids?" the man asked, a faint note of interest in his voice.

"Sure, wearin' bath gowns and had two dandy girls in butterfly cloaks. One of the girls clawed at me and I boxed her ears. Say, she howled like hell and the boys just sort of fell round her and slobbered. I quit. Give us a smoke, Pete." The man passed him a cigarette, and when it was lit John turned again to his friend.

"Say, Pete, you're pretty low. Is it the strike?"

Pete nodded curtly and spat into the water as he answered, "Yuh, I should say it is the strike." But beyond that he offered no information, so John contented himself with puffing at his cigarette and dividing his attention between the fading wreaths of smoke and the toilet of the hairy stoker. There too Pete's eyes stayed fixed.

So intent the look, so hard the eyes riveted on that splashing giant from beneath the black and boldly arching brows, that John, as he flung the stump of his fag away, forgot to listen if he could hear the red ash sizzle as

it fell into the sea that dirtily rubbed against the piles of the wharf, like the back of a seal.

"Say, Pete, is it the stoker?"

"Yuh, it's the stoker."

"Why?"

"Scab," and Pete spat again.

"Ah," said John, "the bastard," and fell also to watching the stoker, who was now emptying his bucket into the sea.

For three weeks the coastwise shipping from Seattle to Santiago had been tied up by the strike. Pete was west-coast organizer of the I.W.W. and the strike was of his calling, his child which he nursed and fed and commanded as Napoleon commanded, fed and nursed his Grand Army.

The stoker having finished his bath and pulled on his shirt and pants, sat down on a winch with his back towards them, filled a pipe and smoked contentedly while Pete explained him to John.

"They came yesterday. Scabs from every crimp's lodging-house on the Pacific coast. We pulled the dockers out last night and I guess there'll soon be bloody murder."

"Can't you fix them?"

"No. Gunmen in every ship. Sheriff's going around the town collecting all the tough guys he can lay hands on, and a car load of thugs came in on the mail s'morning. The dockers have made 'em savage, and I guess the bosses have told the sheriff he's got to finish with us bums tonight."

"How?"

"Clean up the Wobbly Hall first. They'll come around tonight and frame up somebody's pulled a gun on them. Then I'll lay we shall see some scrap. You keep along home tonight, kid, or I'll skin you."

These last words he said so commandingly that John

did not dare argue, so he fell to whistling drearily, in tune with his elder.

After a long interval he ventured again to interrupt Pete's gloomy reflections.

"Say, Pete, you got your gun all right?"

The other rested his palms on his belt a moment. "Like hell I have. Both of 'em. But you should worry, kid. I been through worse than this and kind of feel that there's some may be sorrier than me tonight. Yes, sir." Somehow the bold words held little conviction, so to prevent the discomfort of further adventures into the secrets of the coming night, the pair, man and boy, fell to staring again till the glow in the sky from the great red orb of the sun lit the stoker with fire, and he rose and left their sight.

Pete remained, a powerful, menacing figure. Dark hair, a nose that curved like an Indian's, a heavy chin, blue black with much shaving, a rather short, broad body set on thick and sturdy thighs and legs. He moved with a cowpuncher's swagger, wearing a blue coat and pants, his shirt a gay tartan affair, and his right hand was always tucked in his black leather belt. Every harbour and mining camp on the Pacific Slope knew Pete Mason thus.

He was something of a legend. Though women crawled at his feet he had married a pale little school-marm of a girl, with bobbed hair and a fringe. When one of Burns' men shot dead Joe Sanger, the leader of the Jackson mining strike, Pete came straight to the camp. The thug had come every night to the saloon to boast of the murder, daring any one to touch him, and the night Pete arrived the whole camp was there, waiting to see what would happen.

They hadn't long to wait, for Pete walked in wearing two guns, and went straight to the table where the thug sat playing poker with his mates. The man got up to meet him, but though his hand was on his own gun he did not

dare to draw it, for the eyes of a hundred men were following Pete's glance and taking courage from it.

"You murdered Joe Sanger," was all Pete said, but almost as he spoke he struck the Burns man between the eyes, knocking him down. From where he lay on the floor the thug fired, but he was dazed and missed. He did not get a chance to correct his aim, for Pete shot him dead where he lay. The thug had fired first, as Pete intended, and there was not a soul who dared lay a hand on him for this act of justice.

Since the war things had changed and where once a strike had ended in blood it ended now in massacre. What had once been work for gunmen hired from the jails was done now with machine guns by the whole force of the State. Yet Pete carried on, swaggering as before, even growing a little fat beneath the black leather belt.

John had faith in him, as others believed in the supremacy of American civilization, or the Ku Klux Klan, or Jehovah. Nevertheless the sight of the stoker had also made him feel menaced and uneasy. He wished he might have had time to put his shoes on in the fight with the millionaire boys so as he could have broken their shins.

Meanwhile it was growing late. Back at home the Shurins, with whom he lived, would be waiting supper and old man Shurin hated to wait for his meals. As usual he would eat John's supper too, just for spite, if he was not there in time; so he got up, asked for another cigarette and, lighting it, prepared to go.

He felt concerned at Pete's trouble, for he owed him all he knew in knowledge of the world, in desire for life at its best and richest. A street arab who had never known a blood relation, Pete had in some way adopted him and given him knowledge that lifted him beyond the loafing boys of his kind, knowledge that allowed him to dominate and lead. Vaguely he felt this friend to be in danger, but

the call to supper was urgent and in any case it would not do to betray feeling. He assumed Pete's own swagger.

"Guess I'll be getting along, Pete. No use making the old man wild, back home. I should say you'll hand them something if there's any trouble down along tonight."

Pete laughed. "Like hell I will. So long, kid." In spite of the laugh he kept his glance steadily averted, fixed on the fo'c'sle of the steamer whence the stoker had disappeared. But when John had passed up the quay, puffing his fag, the man turned his head after him, and the boy too looked round. But they were too far away to see in the dusk what was in one another's eyes.

CHAPTER IV

It was the universal supper time and there were few folk left near the old harbour, so that John turning off the wharf into the street that led from home was surprised to see a parson standing at the street corner and looking at him with sour distaste. The reverend was young and clean-shaven, with a thin nose and prim petted mouth, his stiff body neatly built into new black clothes. John summed him up: just out of college, he-man, go-getter, hundred per cent. Fundamental virtue in the tan of his face, and at his feet lay innocently a leather suit-case.

As John passed the parson spoke, nasally and loudly.

"Say, young man, cigarettes kill character."

"Yuh," said John, "but I got none to kill, anyway."

"Pertness will put you right aboard Hell's non-stop limited."

"Sure, reverend, and what you say goes. But you'll excuse me if I kinder get along. A boy's first duty is to his parents and I reckon mine are mighty keen t'see me right now."

"If your old folks saw you now, kid, for your soul's sake they'd take the skin off you."

"If I'm late for supper it'll hurt my old man's soul more'n if I ran a saloon," said John, and edged off. The parson reached out as he did so and caught him by the shirt collar.

"Boy, you don't quit here with that cigarette. You've been mighty pert and it's up to me to thrash the Devil out of you. When that's done I figure to take you to our Y.M.C.A. There's a round-up of God's stray cattle and I guess a wild young steer like you is going to bring joy to Heaven when he's roped and branded with the Y brand into God's own herd."

While the reverend was speaking John was thinking. The suit-case—the neighbourhood—round by the old harbour John knew that the wild young steers were few and untamable. On the other hand, very near was the shack of Moses Schweitzer, and to Moses came many visitors with cases—all kinds of folk from the Judge and the Police Captain down to young clerks and college men.

"Say now, reverend, you wouldn't lick a kid that's never had a chance to hear the word. I never had any folks, reverend; brought up in an orphanage and adopted last year by theosophical Russians. Reverend, I will quit tobacco this minute and join the Y, if you'll promise not to lick me."

But John's free body and roving eyes always infuriated the fanatical or prim and the parson did not relent.

"The Lord will love you better if you've suffered before repentance. It's as plain as the Woolworth Tower, you're a regular J. P. Morgan in sin, and it's got to be beaten out." The reverend's left arm swung ominously for a second.

Quick as thought John's head went down, and hard and sinful propelled itself into the holy belly, while one foot

violently kicked the suit-case, knocking it over. In terror the priest let go his grip and dived earthwards. Too late. A second swift kick burst the case open and with a tinkle of broken glass there flowed from it a thin golden stream.

In wild dismay the young parson bent over the irretrievable ruin. That night was to have been privately celebrated at the house of the Hon. Wm. B. Carleton, Elk, Odd Fellow, Knight of Pythias, Rotarian, Moose, Eagle and Mystic Worker, the successful conclusion of Forty-Second Street Y.M.C.A.'s round-up of sinners in the Grand, Go-Get-'Em Pacific Coast Drive Against Sin.

John knew nothing of this, though round the corner of Second Street he met two citizens with their wives, and told them a parson was in trouble by the wharf. They ran to help him.

CHAPTER V

At home the untidy room was just the same, but John was not, and as he came in he felt a sudden contempt for his foster parents which was almost a flash of hatred. Old man Shurin, his coat and collar off, his shirt open below his scraggy throat, grumbled at him as usual as he sat down to supper, while Maria Ivanovna put down her book upon a greasy plate to ask him plaintively why he did not kiss her.

He slid off his chair and came round to do so with not too bad a grace, for she was a good woman. Brown hair streaked with grey, one thick strand always escaping over her plump neck, dreamy brown eyes set in a broad kind face; she was a startling contrast to John, dark, live and boyish. That was what first attracted her to him when she went to the Seamen's Orphanage in obedience to a call from the Divine Voice that told her to seek there for a vehicle for the Living God. She thought now that she

might have made a mistake and that the voice, maybe, had been too delicate for her gross understanding, but she still loved John.

As John kissed her she sighed, "He's eaten your supper, darling. He was so hungry when he came home from work."

"Yeah, pop's always hungry," said John, "but he doesn't always have to eat two suppers. He only has one when I'm here."

"You should come in to time," grumbled Shurin in Russian. "Nobody ever knows what you're doing. You ought to be learning—science and mathematics. You ought to be at home planning to become a great man, like Henry Edsel Ford or Thomas A. Edison. You will never be an intelligent man, Vanka—no, you're too much of a barbarian." He spoke in a soft voice, but he always spoke too much and too quickly.

Maria Ivanovna looked tenderly at him. "You just wait a minute, Vanya, I will get you something as soon as I have finished this chapter." Being a theosophist she never felt hungry, nor did she ever imagine that anybody else felt so, except Shurin, whom she had married before she saw the Light, and who had always eaten like a pig.

Tonight John felt in no mood to hurry her. He went back to his chair and sat moodily, thinking about Pete and the bad luck of having met a black-garbed parson on his way home. This was so unlike him that Marusia noticed the silence, put down her book and busied herself to find him something to eat. Shurin stood before the mirror that hung over the sideboard, put on his collar and necktie, produced a comb from somewhere, ran it through his hair, gave a twitch to his beard, and pulled on his coat.

"Marusia, I have an idea—my machine. I think I will take a little stroll to see if something won't come of it."

Shurin was always thinking of inventions, and on the patch of garden he had built a hutch in which were a bench and tools. Sometimes he would retire there for hours, locking himself in, and when he emerged it was noticeable that his speech was thicker and his blue eyes glazed. On such occasions he would make Marusia sit up with him, talking to her into the small hours of his ideas, his honesty and of Beethoven. For Shurin had noticed that the egotism of men drove them to actions which the ideal standard branded as dishonest, and since he himself was unsuccessful in his dealings with his fellows he had become convinced that it could only be because of his inborn honesty. Also he possessed a violin, never played, a certain knowledge of music and an unbounded worship of Beethoven, whom he put on the lofty level of Kropotkin and Reclus, of Henry Ford and Thomas Edison, and far above his minor Gods, Christ, Marat and Walt Whitman.

Sometimes he would be impelled by his genius to walk out into the night and commune with the stars. He seldom returned from such nocturnal adventures before two or three in the morning, and John, who knew most things that are unknown to the innocent, knew whither he went and why he returned thence so tired that he could hardly reach his work in time. For Shurin was an engineer's draughtsman. He went out now and left them alone—John and Marusia.

CHAPTER VI

PERHAPS Marusia was not altogether without knowledge of his wanderings, or of the kind of inspiration his genius sought, for when he was gone she sighed.

"Papa would do better with his inventions out of America."

"Sure," agreed John. "In China he might make a fortune with them on the vaudeville."

"No," said Marusia. "He needs a freer atmosphere. America is a good place for Englishmen and rich people. But Russia is the only country for the poor."

"Ah!" said John, and fell silent.

But not because he was thinking of Shurin. No, he was thinking that in Russia it would not be Pete or any man like him who need fear violent death. He felt lonely and told Marusia about the strike.

"When the World Teacher comes," she assured him, "He will put an end to strife between rich and poor. Universal love will rule, and eternal light."

"Oh!" said John, "love, that's not so bad," for lately he had both learned of love and taught its secrets to straying and wayward girls in privy corners of the beach.

"Yes," continued Marusia, her brown eyes shining, her plump, unwieldy body quivering with expectant delight, "when the Teacher comes men and women will renounce strife, there will be no more marriage and all the joy of life will lie in treading the Way over which He will guide us."

"Maybe," admitted John, "though people mightn't want to tread that way. Pete, for instance, has never been one for religion."

"Well," she granted, coming nearer to earth, "Pete had better come with us to Russia, where he could live in peace. I am sure that when the Teacher comes, He will appear first in Russia and then Pete too will see the Light."

Marusia had a weak heart and was asthmatical. When she spoke a dry cough cut up her phrases and shook the strand of hair that was always escaping from the bun on the nape of her neck.

"No," John answered, "Pete's an American and he'll stay here. He doesn't believe in your teachers and he says

there would be freedom in America as well as in Russia if all the workers combined in one big Union."

"Well, dear, I don't think there's one big Union in Russia and the wicked people have been beaten there. Who knows, perhaps Lenin is to be the teacher."

"Huh, not he. Lenin's got no love for any long-haired preachers, nor has Pete. I only hope Pete will win out, same as Lenin's done."

Marusia's coughing became worse and she decided to go to bed. John helped her clear away and then he too went into his little room and lay on the hard bed, thinking, worrying, till far into the night.

He fell into a restless sleep, full of strange dreams in which Pete emerged strong and full of life, fighting against a host of shapeless bestial figures dressed in the hideous robes of the Ku Klux. Near by stood a black-clothed parson praying aloud, though his words made no sound. Marusia passed heavily by, coughing and gazing raptly at flames that suddenly rose hotly about Pete. "The Light," she was saying.

Then the scene changed. Shurin was talking to a girl at the street corner when Lenin appeared and asked him for Pete. Shurin looked frightened. "I don't know, I don't know," he kept repeating, and then catching his painted girl by the arm they ran away. John saw himself fighting again with the boys on the beach, only now they seemed bigger and more fierce. He kept calling on Pete to help him but no one came. It looked as though they would beat him in some dreamlike, evil way, when there was a sound like bursting thunder and he woke.

The door had slammed as Shurin came in, and John heard him breathing hard and muttering to himself as he fumbled for the light. Then he sat down heavily in a chair and groaned: "Ai! Gospody, Bozhe moi, what a horror, what a horror!"

Horror, too, seized John as the whining voice reached him through the wall, and he leapt out of bed and hurried into the room. Shurin was sitting there trembling, his head thrown back, showing his skinny throat, his clawlike hands gripping his knees, and over and over again he muttered, "What a horror, what a horror!"

When he saw John watching him he sat up suddenly, and passed one hand through his tangled, sweat-damp hair.

"They have killed your friend, Vanka," he said. "Down at the I.W.W. Hall. The night was so calm that I heard the shots and went to watch. Oh, God! They had set the place on fire and as the men ran out to save themselves they shot them down with a machine gun. A man told me that the strikers had put bombs in a ship. I don't know, it may be true. All the time your friend stood there at the window, firing back at the sheriff's men, and they couldn't hit him. What a horror, Vanka! The glow of the flames was on him and he seemed to be laughing. Then all at once the floor gave way and he disappeared. Gospody, Gospody, what beasts men are, to fight so!"

John remained silent, a great weight on his heart, but his only conscious feeling one of hatred and contempt for Shurin, who sat there miserable, snuffling and ejaculating "My God! My God!"

Marusia was suddenly standing behind him and he suffered her to lead him back to bed. For the first time in his life John felt only a little boy, and lonely.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER that night the foreshore no longer seemed so full of life to John. He no longer felt joy in fighting his peers, or in bringing discomfort to the proud and inso-

lent, and the ecstasy had gone from boat trips with pilots and longshore men.

There was now no Pete to whom he could tell these things, from whom he could get advice and knowledge. For the first time emptiness and vanity crept into John's life. In short, Pete's death forced him to meditate upon the sense of life, and the result of his meditations was that there seemed little sense in it. He would sit for long, aimless hours, exploring the blue waste of the sea, as if he expected to find there some new direction for his life, some fresh hope. But the sea was always empty.

Shurin urged him to go to school, not to waste his opportunities. Yet what was the use of that? John realized he could never sit quietly now upon a class bench and be driven along the common path of life.

Years and years ago it seemed since he had been born, and left to the charity of the world. He remembered the faces of many strange women, uniformed, uncertain-tempered, the smell of soap and disinfectants, long, bare dormitories, hordes of other children with whom he had squabbled and fought. All this vaguely, in short, disturbing pictures.

Then the long period of the seamen's orphanage, the rough discipline, the hard fight to make for oneself a tolerable place among the other boys, a bitter struggle for the right to live and not to be subdued into a mere bullied block, or the toady of some brief king of the herd. He had won, won against them all, against the boys, the petty officers, the schoolmasters, the rare and haughty officers, the chaplain, and the memory of the struggle was bittersweet with the triumph of fights and beatings endured.

All those boys had been the children of seamen, in their blood the lust of wandering, the taint of diseases contracted on strange shores. They were being trained to the

use of the sea, to the science of wandering, and the only kindly moments their rough lives knew were when some petty officer, warmer-hearted than the rest, unbent to tell a tale of hardship suffered or wonder seen upon the sea. When the parson read the Bible to them in the chapel the only parts they heard with attention were those referring to the sea. There was the adventure of Jonah and the whale. In their minds they likened the parson to Jonah and thought it a sad thing that the whale should ever have coughed him up to threaten again the safety and comfort of sailormen. Or it might be the journeys of Paul. John remembered vividly all those parts which told of storm and perils endured at sea.

In the end he had gone to sea himself. The summer before last a contingent from the orphanage had been sent for an ocean trip to China in the U.S. Training Cruiser *Chickamauga*. He had been the youngest of all.

After that trip there had been an end of wandering. Shurins had adopted him and he had left the narrow, little world of the orphanage. Had it not been for Pete the result would have been disaster. The Shurins could never have controlled him, never have broken down the walls that separated his childhood from the warm, free life of mankind. But Pete had done so, for one brief year.

Now it was all over. In those bitter days after the murder of his friend John began to realize what life had made of him. He was hard enough to become a wastrel, a pickpocket, anything, but not human enough to go to school, to work in a store or factory, to settle down as other fellows seemed to do.

He could feel something dark and violent in him, something that wanted to smash and lay waste, something hot but incurably lazy. Pete had known how to manage that, to control it so that life seemed a gay adventure. Pete

had been all the meaning of life to John, and while he lived there had been no need to seek for any significance in things, to question the future.

The very vagabond spirit which so nearly ruined him during these hopeless days of drift in the end saved John. It saved him because in him the restless desire to see and to wander worked with such violence that he did not fall into the mere viciousness of harbour-side vagabondage, though he came very near to it. And for many years, until he had completely found himself, the danger was always there, the menace of the dark and violent depths.

The first gleam of light came to him during one of those long, sea-gazing afternoons. He was thinking of the strange variety of life beyond the horizon, as he had seen it during the voyage in the cruiser, and wondering what difference it would make to him if he were once again to take ship and start the only life that seemed at all possible.

A curious adventure that had befallen him in Tientsin came back to his mind, and it suddenly occurred to John that the attraction of that strange incident had been the character of the two chief participants. Like Pete, they had been sure of themselves, steady-eyed and confident of their part in the adventure of life.

At Tientsin he had landed with a shore party and somehow contrived to give the petty officer in charge the slip. For the harbour side of that lively Chinese city was something far too interesting to miss—the lively coolies in their cotton pyjamas, the junks and sampans crowded together like so much old wood upon the waters, the go'-downs and tall refrigerator buildings, and then the town itself with the flower-like women, the students wearing their long nightgowns, horned spectacles and straw hats, the merchants in their rickshaws, and everywhere in the narrow, winding streets long streamers bearing the mysterious coloured characters.

He came back to where he thought the boat should have been, trying to think of some story to explain his disappearance when he should meet the party again, and found to his dismay that he had missed the way. There was no warship's boat to be seen. Nor was there one of the queer khaki-clad policemen swinging a long truncheon meditatively from his wrist.

Just here was nothing but some dilapidated go'downs, so feeling tired of wandering in the heat he sat down to rest with his back against the shed before pursuing his search.

Two men, foreigners, with a Chinese, came and stood near without seeing him. The men spoke horrible pidgin-English to the Chinaman, which John only followed with difficulty, but what they said interested him.

"One bad man he come along. We wait here. You askee man somedings. We catchee hold him and you kickee him plenty hard in belly. Then we take papers and we throw bad man in water. Sabee, John? Then you say noding. Plentee monee, John."

They whispered a minute before disappearing to ambush, while the Chinaman leaned up against a go'down, impassively smoking. Whoever was expected was to come from John's direction. It wasn't his affair, but to interfere would be exciting, so he slipped silently away up the quay and waited.

Presently a young man in a khaki suit came along, a handsome fair young man with a slight stoop of the shoulders. If this was to be the victim he liked him, so John passed by him quickly, and said softly, "Here, danger! Don't speak."

The young man must have been used to the unusual, for without saying a word he turned and followed John away from the ambush. Only he did at once slip one hand into his coat pocket and it stayed there, lightly

grasping something, till they were among people again and John had said "All right." Then the young man smiled, withdrawing his hand from his pocket. "What is it?" he asked, and his voice also had a foreign accent.

John briefly told him, and he whistled. "Come with me to have an ice at Keltner's," he invited him. "My name is Schumann—Yakov Schumann."

Inside the cool café where all Tientsin takes its tiffin and its ease, the young man thanked him, warmly but not too profusely, and John began to like him enormously. He was fair-haired, with an aquiline nose and very quizzing blue eyes. There was something brisk and active in his manner, but his good fellowship softened all.

A tall, thin young man, unshaven and shaggy as a bear, with spectacles on his Jewish nose, came into the café, and seeing Schumann crossed quickly to their table.

"Sdrastvitye, Yasha, but what are you doing here?" The other put a warning finger to his lips, and when the new-comer was seated explained something to him in a low voice, in Russian. When Yasha had introduced his friend, whose name was Michael Ossipov, they talked to John in very bad English. He did not get much from them, but apparently Michael worked in a refrigerating plant and Yasha had no obvious occupation, save to avoid getting kicked in the belly and dropped in the harbour.

Apart from their friendship some common adventure united them, but John got no inkling of its nature, for when they talked of their own affairs it was in Russian, which at that time, before he lived with the Shurins, he did not understand at all.

So John told them about himself, how his mother and father, the island woman and English sailor, were both dead before he was a year old, so that he had been taken into the Seamen's Orphan Home. Then came the cruise

and here he was with them, almost as good as a deserter, if they didn't take him back to the ship pretty quick.

Yasha had something to do, but Michael, thin scarecrow Michael, took him to the boat. All the way Michael was telling him what a wonderful thing he had done by saving his friend and how in so doing he had saved a good many other people too, including himself.

"Ach! How I love you, John," he kept exclaiming rapturously, squeezing his arm, but John did not mind this demonstrativeness, for he could feel that Michael was a good fellow and he guessed that his adventure, whatever it was, was worth while. The boat was still waiting and the atmosphere was sulphurous. Nor did Michael's broken English and strange appearance improve matters. John parted from him with lively regret, his fellowship contrasted so strongly with the painful reception in store for him on board.

As he thought of this incident life for a moment took on again a form more friendly that might be understood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE summer wore on, but John's despondency did not fade. He was not bitter, nor yet inactive, only each day passed by in dullness and his dumps grew almost beyond bearing, destroying delight in man or woman.

About the time of his fifteenth birthday he jumped a freight train and travelled to Portland, Oregon. Yet it might as well have been Portland, Maine, for the Western city brought no solace, nor any end to aimless grieving.

Three days later he was home, and whether it was sheer despair, or lack of will to resist the nagging of Shurin and the cheerless pleading of Marusia, he donned a coat, a

collar and a necktie. Then for a week he attended high school, not with any mind to test the value of Shurin's educational theory, but because he was tired of vagabondage without purpose.

When Pete was alive he had been able to learn much from his waterside adventures. The world of hot and active life, the way of men in ships, on trains, in lumber camps and factories, became apparent to him. With no Pete these things seemed to escape and elude one, and life became mere aimless rascality.

Nevertheless, the donning of the collar, clammy about his round and sun-clad throat, brought with it adventure, and as it was to prove, with adventure, freedom.

Once every month the anarchist group, of which Shurin was a member, met at their house. Not with bombs and conspirators' passwords, but with the arguments of speech and the allics of good food and liquor, they destroyed American society and built a new world nearer to their hearts' desire. Kropotkin, Reclus and Tucker were their idols, though Murphy, the rich dry goods storekeeper, would sometimes hark back to Bakunin when the vitriol of the bootleg whisky from his pocket-flask had burned its way well into his heavy bulk.

Besides Shurin and Murphy there met Poggioli, the Italian restaurant-keeper, Cohen the foreman from the clothing factory, Larsen the chauffeur and Dai Williams the Welsh school-teacher.

They talked of the tyranny of Capital, the new Tsardom of the Trusts, the theoretical errors of Socialists and Communists, and one night John out of sheer boredom went to listen.

They always chose a subject for the night's discussion, but that, as it were, was only the excuse for talking. The discussion might begin on Voltaire, or 1848, but it always continued on that rich variety of themes arising from the

subject of freedom, before reaching its inevitable close on that most fundamental freedom—free love.

Tonight Larsen, the mild-eyed, grey-haired Swede, was denouncing with bitterness Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

"They understood nothing in Russia. They sold themselves to the capitalists and when they moan about freedom they only mean freedom for counter-revolution."

Shurin was inclined to support him, because it was his right to criticize every man, and nothing was so sweet to his bitter heart as criticism of a leader fallen through some inner weakness of faith. It was compensation for not being a leader oneself.

His brown beard bristled—he gesticulated, "Russia is not Communism, but nevertheless Kropotkin went there to die. The forces of liberation are at work, though only imperfectly."

Murphy snarled, and poured himself another glass of whisky. "Bloody tyranny—that's what it is. Berkman was right, the last hope for a free Russia died at Kronstadt."

So they went on: Shurin bitter and weak, Larsen idealistic and full of the glow of ancient fires (he had done five years for a bomb frame-up in his youth), and Murphy bitter too, but with success, proclaiming the rights of the individual, because he had freely asserted his own. Marusia and the others listened, interjected an occasional remark, and admired the three protagonists.

Marusia's natural sympathies were with Larsen, the idealist, the tragedian, whose first wife had drugged herself and who now lived in sin with a former schoolteacher so prim and ugly as to seem quite without sex.

But in these discussions there always came a point when Murphy's eyes suddenly became a little glazed, his voice grew dreamy and his fierce opposition melted away into incoherent harmony. He would seize on some slight

remark of Marusia's reminiscent of paradise, and a state of universal innocence to come. Over the aeons their minds would ride. On the wings of their fancy Murphy and Marusia flew ahead of the others, joined together by the strange and sudden sympathy of perfect antipathy.

John heeded little of their talk, for he could see no sense in it. He was only there because he was bored so much, that in deeper boredom there came a kind of relief.

Poggioli, aged, creased and dirty, was the first to come to the inevitable by crying out, "Freedom, there will be no freedom till man and woman are free in love."

John looked up, hoping for something of a livelier sort.

Murphy for once did not try to dictate some opposite view. "Love, love," he murmured, one hand waving a dream-smoking cigar, the other grasping a dream-creating glass, "love—foundation of life. Liberty in love, only liberty worth having."

Shurin got up and walked nervously round the room, his hands in his trousers-pockets, through long use avoiding shipwreck on the furniture.

"The Free Society will come when men and women are brave enough to smash the bourgeois sex tyranny. That is what crushes the spirit, makes men mere slaves!"

Marusia was jealous of Shurin, for by a strange freak she passionately loved that selfish neurotic. "Now, Misha," she began, but was interrupted by her husband.

"Bah, Marusia, you are a bourgeoise. If you took a lover I would not despair. You should have your freedom, I should have mine. Then we would be human beings, not the slaves of filthy instinct," and he stopped and glared at pallid, plump Marusia, while she, coughing, tried to answer him and failed—so overcome was she at the idea of love apart from him.

John got up to leave them and the wave of talk that broke through the opening door burst upon the blue Pacific

night, ebbed, and was shut off for ever as the door closed.

A blue night, pale light in the window of the shadowed house and all around silence.

John made his way down to the harbour side and the starlamps of the ships. Cries and the sounds of unseen labour on winch and derrick came to him disembodied through the warm stillness.

Out there, he reflected, somewhere, in China, or maybe in Russia, are those two, Yasha and Michael. They know what freedom is and I will know too before I die.

CHAPTER IX

THREE weeks later, in the beginning of October, the anarchists met at Murphy's house. John went with Shurin, urged perhaps by remorse, for that week he had given up high school, much to his guardian's disgust.

Murphy was a man of means, but John was not prepared for the magnificence of the suburban home. Neither, in spite of his previous experience, was he prepared for the windy futility of the evening's talk. In a hot moment he slipped through the door and out into the garden, finally settling on the verandah steps.

He had sat there but a few minutes when he was aware of some one watching him from the framework of the door. He turned and saw that it was a young woman, dark and richly built.

"You Shurin's boy?" she asked, and her voice was full, with even something of hoarseness in its depths.

"I live with Shurin," John answered.

"Fed up with the talk?" and she nodded her head a little contemptuously inwards. John noticed that her throat was very white and round.

"Yeh. Just about choked. They were spieling of some

old guy called Bakunin—all bombs and whiskers. Couldn't wait till they got round to free love."

She stepped forward and stood beside him, leaning against the verandah post, looking down. John became aware that her skirt was short and her legs delicious.

"Oh, do they talk of love? I guess they know some." The scorn was deep in her voice.

"Well, I lay that your old man could tell them something—more even than Shurin maybe."

"You're a knowing kid. He's a hot one all right, is dad."

She sat down on the verandah, her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms clasped round them, her back resting against the post. Her chin was a little pointed and her full lips rouged passion red. The cheap scent of powder and paint mingling with the autumn air evoked in John a feeling of nude obscenity.

"What's your name?"

"John."

"Mine's Kitty. Say, John, I'm just crazy to dance. Do you dance?"

"Hornpipe, sword-dance and Highland fling. Learnt 'em in the Seamen's Orphan Home. Guess they're not the stuff for a flash skirt like you." She quizzed him, the flirting blue eyes searching out the healthy animal in him and how she might use it for her ends. "Come into the parlour. There's a gramophone and I'll teach you."

"All right."

They moved aside the furniture, set the gramophone in motion, and then adventured into the syncopated meanderings of the dance. John had a body so practised and balanced that he found no difficulty in harmonizing its motions to the music. After a few rounds he was guiding her, and she, rapturous with the easy motion and the firm pres-

sure of his body, gazed with bright eyes into his flushed face.

"Oh! boy, you dance divinely," she murmured. "Come with me to the Metropolitan next Saturday and we'll dance, oh! we'll dance!"

"I'm game," said John, and noticed that her nose tilted up at the end.

"The old man will be away East and we'll come right home here for a quiet little supper. What do you say?"

"That'll be just fine," he assured her, and tried to think of any secret refinement of speech or dress which he might use upon her. Not that he wished to make her think he was one of her own kind, but simply to see what the effect might be. Natural curiosity.

They sat down to rest on the sofa, and it did not seem strange that her arm was round his shoulder and his about her yielding waist. John was frankly interested. The girls he had known had been strays from the slums, without complications or allurements, girls of his own age. But she was from another world, the world that starts with store-keepers' daughters and goes right through the movies to the millionaires. She was clearly one who moved on the edge of the same circle of thought and sensation as the inhabitants of the palaces on the Bluff. He remembered the girl in the butterfly bathing cloak, whom he had slapped. In two or three years that girl would be a young woman like Kitty, only with lots more money and a Rolls-Royce instead of an Overland.

He knew what it was like to slap such a one. What would be the effect of a kiss? He tried it.

She laughed and kissed him back, so hotly that he nearly choked with the unfamiliar rouge and powder. However, they were getting on very well when doors were opened and the sounds of disintegrating argument floated in upon their embraces. The anarchists were going home.

John got up. Kitty laughed self-consciously and producing a puff and lipstick swiftly restored the ravages of love.

"Don't forget, next Saturday. I'll wait for you in the car at the corner of Grant Avenue, quarter to nine," were her last words.

The others came in. The party broke up and John followed Shurin home. Shurin was talking excitedly to the bright stars on the errors of Bolshevism.

CHAPTER X

JOHN felt he was changing. The ragged friends of his childhood began to fall away. Marusia and Shurin noted it with delight, but in his own heart was only disgust. Then one night the high school teacher came to see why he was absent from class.

John hated the sallow face, the horn spectacles, the thick dark hair brushed back. Clearly the teacher did not quite know how he was to proceed with his mission, for Shurin prevented all argument with an immense monologue on education.

"Mr. Kennedy, the boy's a barbarian. He cannot see the benefits of enlightenment. To be sure, I am no believer in American democracy, for to any man of education its sham nature is apparent. But to scorn what it can offer, sir, to turn one's back upon the light of knowledge, presented in no matter how impure a way, that is sheer savagery."

In vain Mr. Kennedy wished to protest that American education had no such limitations. Imperious Shurin waved him aside.

"I come from a land of darkness myself, sir, where now perhaps we see the first flush of dawn, yet I thank God, though I do not believe in God, Mr. Kennedy, that

I was diligent with my studies, even in dark Russia, and today I am an educated man. Yes, sir, I am an educated man. Error has no terrors for me. I can proudly say, sir, that having once seen the light I have always marched towards it."

"Education undoubtedly promotes a love of the ideal, Mr. Shurin, but—"

"Ah!" the impetuous Shurin interrupted, "you wish to add—'but it brings material benefit none the less.' Very true, very true. Look at your great Edison, look at Henry Ford!

"I am an anarchist, Mr. Kennedy. That means that I know that the liberation of the human race can only come when man has developed to the utmost the vast potentialities of nature. Yet, sir, though I am a foreigner, an anarchist, an outcast of your American society, I can bow before the immortal genius of Ford."

Here the schoolmaster interposed firmly, determined to have his say. "I am very glad to hear you so reasonable, Mr. Shurin. I wish all parents took your view of the immense uplifting possibilities of education, and our work would be considerably lighter. I can take it then that you'll see this young man comes back to school tomorrow."

"I'll certainly put it to him," said Shurin, a little taken aback by the direct attack.

"You can save your wind," John rudely assured him. "What the hell's the good of their schooling to me?"

The schoolmaster blushed. "At least it might bring some refining influence into your life. And it seems to be needed."

"I hadn't noticed it," answered John.

The schoolmaster, seeing that anger led nowhere, tried flattery and friendly argument.

"Listen, John. You're a very intelligent boy. By working at school you could easily get a good job when you're

through. You have every chance of getting on in the world and becoming anything you want to be. There are still opportunities for a young man in these United States."

"Sure," the boy agreed, very politely, "but how if I don't want to get on, Mr. Kennedy? How if I don't want to be anything? Your school makes me sick and education makes me sick, and I guess there's just a few things that I could teach those boobs who rub their bottoms on your class benches every morning, Mr. Kennedy."

The teacher blushed again, trying hard not to show temper. "You'll come to no good in that spirit, John. It's conceited and stupid. You've got wrong ideas, and you ought to listen to men older than yourself who know what the world is."

Shurin lifted his arm above his head as though about to make some prophetic declamation. "John, you do not love humanity. The happiness of life, the poetry of life, is living for humanity. Forget yourself in the battle of the oppressed." He became more pompous, more carried away by the wind of his own words. "That is the faith of Berkman, of Kropotkin. I might even have said"—and here he turned abruptly, seized the schoolmaster by the shoulder and poured his passionate speech willy-nilly over that unhappy man—"of Henry Ford, Mr. Kennedy. I will confess, sir, that I have met with disillusion in America. When I first came here a poor emigrant, I thought that in the strong and youthful democracy of this continent the millions of the oppressed would find their freedom and salvation. It has not been so, but I will still say, sir, that something yet remains, that there is something elementary and simple in the genius of your American great men which permits me to retain something of my faith."

John broke in. "Is that what you mean, Mr. Kennedy? Listen to Shurin? or you? Well, I've heard you both now

till I thought you were going to talk the roof off the house. And what have you said? That if I want to be like you I am to wear my pants through on a class-room bench with a crowd of half-baked morons and stuck-up girls. Thank you, sir, I have had some of that and I am not having any more."

"Well, in God's name what do you want?" Shurin cried out in angry desperation, his long arms dropping to his side, as he let go his hold on the teacher.

"I don't know. I want to work my own way among my own people. And that's not your way, nor your people, Mr. Kennedy."

Marusia, who had been silent till now, save for an occasional dry cough, spoke to the schoolmaster.

"Perhaps he is seeking for THE way, Mr. Kennedy. We should not worry him, for I think that he will find it by himself."

But the teacher was not a theosophist and did not understand the divine allusion. Politeness, however, made him answer.

"No, mum, you can't say that any American school neglects what I reckon you were getting at in that very interesting remark—the spiritual uplifting of the young citizens of this country."

Here John got up and walked out, leaving them to make the best of it.

In the old days, a few months ago, he reflected bitterly, such a humiliation would have been impossible. Once escaped from the prison of the Seamen's Orphanage he had sworn that society should never make him captive again. In that place at least the boys had been slaves in half-open rebellion, only kept under by an iron discipline, but the school, where the boys and girls appeared not only to submit to but even to approve of their subjection, to feel

no restraint and to aim at becoming good citizens with bank balances and automobiles and their own bootlegger, that was something so horrible it could not be borne.

John knew from Pete's example that a man who wasn't afraid to use his hands could keep his freedom, even though it meant an endless wandering over the earth and continual fighting. Society had been unable to tame Pete, so in the end it had turned on him and killed him. Even at fifteen that much was clear to any one, clear above all to John who had seen something of the world. Well, better to die like Pete than live as Shurin and the schoolmaster wanted him to live.

The desk—desks in school, in offices, in millionaires' private carpeted rooms—the desk was the symbol of baseness and slavery.

He tramped for an hour or two up and down the lighted side-walks in the centre of the town.

Under the bright electric glare the people moved upon their evening pleasures. Young men and women, arm in arm, whispered the puny loves that troubled their mean little bodies. They strolled along on the way to café, theatre or dance hall, older men passed by talking of dollars, how they are lost and won, of wives and mistresses, how they are won and lost. Grim-jawed, high-cheeked policemen looked vacantly for evil, and from time to time as John passed by some villa he heard the rasping drone of a gramophone giving proof to the outer world of the domestic felicities within.

Hands deep in his trouser pockets, wayward head bent and under-lip thrust menacingly out, John wandered. Prostitutes half advanced towards him from beneath the street lamps, withdrawing when they saw no money in his face. Once a man in tight black clothes, a parson maybe, John did not notice, caught his arm and spoke some obscenity in his ear. He shook him off angrily, came into the

harbour, where drunken sailors lounged and quarrelled with their slatterns, and there he drew a breath of relief.

In a quiet spot by the waterside he sat down and collected himself. Uppermost in his mind rose the image of Kitty. He hated her and a sudden desire came to him to see how far he could go with this girl, to plumb the depths of this society that wanted to take him and tie him to it, to its ideas of work, wealth and women. Well, he'd see.

He took a clanging street car up into the suburbs and about half-past ten came into Murphy's garden. Everything was quiet here, where trees and gardens were fashioned to ape the luxurious vastness of wild Pacific nature. Pigmy stupidity. But still it was quiet, so quiet that Kitty's shrill laugh breaking the stillness made him start. She wasn't alone then! From the window by the verandah a little patch of golden light was reflected on to the path. He crept up silently and looked in from behind a bush.

Kitty was lying upon a cushioned divan, wearing only a pink chemise. Above her stood a man, and it wasn't necessary that he should speak for John to recognize Shurin.

He turned away. A sudden lust for revenge, a desire for a swift explosion came over him. In a flash he rushed home and told Marusia of what he had seen.

He told her swiftly, furiously, the words choking at his mouth as they poured out. Fat, graceless Marusia, as jealous as a movie girl, was up and out with a speed that astonished even John. He felt no regret when she had gone, but went into his room and flung himself face downward on the bed, biting the sheets in a kind of helpless fury at the indifferent world.

An hour later they came in, a tamed and miserable Shurin led captive by a coughing, red-cheeked Marusia, and though nothing was said that night John knew in his heart that their lives were changed, that something was about to happen to them all.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER that night John took off his collar and necktie, nor did he ever again put them on. With this renunciation of respectability on his part the world became more settled, and the complex of bitter feeling that had driven him to his denunciation of Shurin dissolved and disappeared.

Shurin was not repentant, but he dared not repeat his exploit. Only, when Marusia's coughing grew worse, you might note a kind of light in his eyes, as though he heard sounding afar off the trumpets of his freedom.

As for Marusia, the doctor told her that her case was becoming well-nigh desperate and she clung to Shurin as though he were life itself. At the same time her mysticism grew, vague and vast and strange, and with it her love for John.

The doctor talked of a long sea voyage, and a change of air. It might cure, it might kill, you could never tell with one in her condition. He thought it was a safe thing to say, for he knew the Shurins were poor and a long voyage out of the question, so that if she died he could blame it on to society, and not on his skill. While if by chance they did manage the voyage—well, he was safe there too, for did he not say it would either cure or kill?

Shurin retired so frequently now to the hut in the garden that they hardly saw him at night. Sometimes when he came in with glazed eyes, thick voice and faltering step, he would rail obscurely at the bonds upon genius.

"The world is dull," he would say. "Let only a man show he is above his fellows and they crowd to shoot the eagle down."

"Misha, my little dove," Marusia soothed him, "don't

grow bitter. One day the world will change and you will have your opportunity."

He took no notice. "How many men of genius," he asked darkly, "have had their lives ruined by the narrow bonds of wife and family? Genius must be free—free to love, free to create," and he flung out his arms, half despairingly, half in weak menace. John, whose part in his fall was still unknown to him, remained silent, while man and wife fought out their quarrel.

Marusia's efforts to retain him grew more painful, and often now she lay back on the couch pale and breathless, her great body shaken with dry, convulsive coughing.

"Let us go away," she urged when she could speak. "Perhaps in another country there is a freer life where they will know how to appreciate you, Misha, and where I can grow strong again."

"Ach! in Russia," he would agree. "Maybe, maybe, but the Bolsheviks have made great mistakes—they have no love for us anarchists with our passion for freedom. Freedom is a difficult thing, difficult thing, freedom—" He made an effort to drive confusion from his speech and mind. "Need great love of freedom to be able to build free society."

"All the same," said John, "life is new and different in Russia. We may get a chance there."

"Lenin is a great Saviour," asserted Marusia.

Shurin's bearded chin sank wearily into his hands. "Maybe, maybe. We will go; it couldn't be worse than here."

But nothing could be more certain than that they would never have gone had not Shurin's devotion to the consolation of his cabin ultimately achieved his ruin.

One night he came home, pale, with sweat on his brow and nervously muttering. He ate no supper and made no

answer to Marusia's anxious inquiries. His head sunk in his hands, he remained at the table till the sound of John's coming in (he had been out on one of his restless wanderings), aroused him.

He sat up and turned towards the boy. His collar was off, his open shirt revealed the black hairs on his bony chest. One arm was raised, a scraggy finger pointed at John.

"Listen, Vanka, this country is accursed. They do not know the meaning of gratitude. They care nothing for genius. No, they hate it. Clear out while you are young and shake its filthy dust from your feet."

Marusia got up in alarm. John stood puzzled. "What is it, my darling?" she asked Shurin.

He rose, thrusting his hands in his pockets, declaiming with shrill emphasis.

"Today they have dismissed me. Me, Shurin, who might have made their fortune! They said I was not reliable. The fools, who do not know that genius is erratic and cannot be bound. Curse them, curse them!"

"Oh! you've been fired," said John, relieved that it was nothing worse, for he had been afraid for a moment that it was the madness of the bottle.

Marusia gave a little cry, and collapsed on the sofa.

Shurin went on. "Can they wonder that the workers, oppressed beyond endurance, rise up and take a bloody revenge? If their damned factory had gone sky high with some terrorist bomb I should have shouted for joy."

"Well," said John, "you're an anarchist. Blow it up."

"No," he denied, "I am no longer an anarchist. Today I declare that I, Shurin, have been mistaken, that the Communists were right and the workers must organize for the conquest of power. I am a Bolshevik."

"Will you be joining the Communists?" asked John. "Six of them were jailed last week."

"No," said Shurin proudly. "I am done with America, this land of slavery. I am going back to Russia, to my own country, where the workers are building up a free Republic. They will have need of my talents."

Marusia looked up, almost a smile of perfect happiness came over her tired face. "You are really going, Misha? We shall go home? Ach! thank God, my dear, thank God!"

CHAPTER XII

THEY did not sail till the spring, and then it was in a Japanese steamer for Yokohama *en route* to Vladivostok.

Marusia had become much worse during the winter and the voyage made no improvement. But Shurin became a different man. His cheeks tanned and filled out, the dullness fled from his eyes and he could hardly sit still a moment, so impatient was he to see the coast of Siberia.

John too had changed. America faded behind in the dawn of a spring day, and where he sat perched among the rusty cables in the fo'c'sle, his eyes turned westward over the Pacific, the sea seemed to burn his nostrils, to salt his young frame with the vigour of new life.

He was at home in his own element. The yellow, high-cheeked sailors greeted him amiably into their fraternity and he pattered barefoot about the decks, exploring, or sat watching the slow revolutions of the sun, the patterns of the heaving ocean and the coloured islands that made infrequent landfalls for their ship.

Behind they had left littleness and bitter memories. Before them was a new life. In the great space of air and sea John was re-born.

Part Two

THE PACIFIC—WEST COAST

CHAPTER I

"THE rats are deserting the ship!" growled the big hotel-keeper venomously. John, from his corner of the little hotel bedroom, looked at him in surprise, he was so big and so venomous. It was the first time he had come up into their room, and downstairs in the narrow hall, where he was half concealed behind a counter, he had not seemed so big, nor so explosive, though his eye was apt to roam malevolently over the visitors, as though he suspected them all of the intention of flitting with bills unpaid.

He stood now with his back against the stove, his broad shoulders a little bowed (perhaps he was afraid of hitting the low roof), and from this position he positively growled at Shurin who was sitting on the unmade bed.

"There's nothing more to be got out of Vladivostok, Mihael Leonidich, and the rats are escaping before the storm, taking their loot with them."

"It doesn't matter," Shurin assured him. "I never intended to stay in Vladivostok. I have no love for the Whites, even with the Japanese behind them. Without the Japanese,—well, they're nothing, muck! No, I'm going on to Moscow, or to Petrograd. They will find me useful there. I have knowledge, I have ideas, I have not spent twenty-five years in America in vain, Mosei Grigorich."

The big Jew looked at him almost pleasantly, his envious mouth twisting into the nearest thing to a smile he was capable of, showing three gold teeth.

"I am sure I wish you luck, Shurin. But you're an anarchist. They're not exactly welcome across the frontier. Who knows? You might do better here. We have all sorts —Orthodox fanatics, all for God and the Tsar and Holy Russia, Social Democrats, Anarchists, Social Revolutionaries. Oh! such a happy family! We all get along very pleasantly together, I'm sure. We live upon one another and on what remains of the English, Americans and Japanese. If only you had a daughter, or a pretty wife, now, instead of just your boy!"

The fellow leered at John, who smiled cheerfully back at him, because he wanted to keep his wits about him and vomiting would have put him at a disadvantage.

Shurin moved restlessly on the bed. "Don't be a fool, Mosei Grigorich. I'm about as much an anarchist today as you are. My views are changing. It's the fires of revolution! Ever since I was turned out of that blasted America I have felt more and more that the Bolsheviks are on the right track, and that we anarchists have been mistaken. What you say is disgusting. My very soul is hurt at such thoughts. You know my wife is dead, poor sainted woman, and you in your loose way come out with these foul suggestions about prostituting our women folk to Japanese and Englishmen and God knows whom else of the world's scourings. You're a beast, Mosei Grigorich. The Allied occupation has spoiled you."

This time the hotel-keeper really laughed, and John noted with interest that yet another gold tooth became visible at the very back of his mouth.

"Oh! my dear Shurin, I'm a beast, am I? Maybe, but not such a fool though. And what would you be if you had lived for four years in a menagerie, Mihael Leonidich? For that's what this place has been—a damned menagerie of Czechs, English, Americans, Cossacks, Holy Russians, all scheming, and murdering and lechering, day and night,

day and night!" His voice dropped into a soft note, almost caressing the last words, "day and night, day and night." John came quite near to feeling sorry for him. Clearly the man had lived through something that was abominable.

Shurin sat bolt upright. "Well, anyway, I am going. Vladivostok is no place for an honest man. Moreover the thought of it is now unbearable to me. When Marusia lay ill in Tokio, she used to say to me, 'Ah! Misha, my darling, if only I could get strong enough to reach Vladivostok! If only I could die when I had set foot on Russian soil again!' Every time I walk the streets I think that my dear wife is not with me, and the thought is unbearable." He rubbed his bearded chin along the palm of one hand, apparently really affected by the thought.

John looked at him steadily. Was he really haunted by the thought of Marusia, dying in agony in that terrible Tokio hotel, neglected and lonely in her death as in her life? When a woman has been at your side for twenty years, maybe it is difficult to forget the physical presence of her. Perhaps Shurin was still struggling to be free from Marusia, though now she was three months in her grave.

The hotel proprietor shrugged his shoulders irritably, thereby appearing to disturb the balance of the room.

"I don't understand you, Shurin. If you want to go, get out. Anyhow, this is no place to stop in. As I said, the rats are deserting the ship. It is only a question of time before the Bolsheviks are here, and our dear friend and ruler, the Holy General Ditrichs, is going to spend that time making the town into a little holy hell. But you won't find things easy over there at first, especially with your boy."

John thought for a second of intervening, but checked himself, deciding it was better to let them have their say upon his fate, before giving his own opinion.

Shurin lit a cigarette, and coughed nervously for a moment.

"Marusia was very anxious I should care for him. It was almost her dying wish. But what can I do? Coming into this new country I shall be hard pressed myself. The famine is barely over; perhaps in Moscow things aren't so bad, but all the same it's going to be no joke for him."

John knew that he meant "no joke for me," yet he held his peace. The big hotel-keeper turned towards him and once again John felt that the balance of the room was changed, this time against him.

"Ivan Ivanich, you're a clever boy. I have watched you, and you are no fool. Go back to America and you will make your way. You are not like Shurin—you are American born and you have seen a good deal of life. You have a future in your own country."

John wondered if he really meant to be kindly or if the pair of them had discussed all this beforehand.

"Sure it's all the same to me where I go," he answered casually, not because he felt that way, but because he wanted to be free. Shurin was as much a burden to him as he was to Shurin.

Shurin dropped his cigarette, half-smoked, on to the wooden floor and crushed it with the toe of his boot. "I have 250 dollars, John. Marusia gave them to me for you. If I hand them over to you will you go back to America? Together with the money I will give you a letter to my friend Murphy. He will fix you with a job."

"I shall be very glad to go," said John, quite calmly, though his heart was beating fast. "I guess you're both about right, and I'll get along much better back home than over here." Mosei Grigorich smiled again. "That's a fine lad, Ivan Ivanich! You'll get along in the world all right."

"When are you going to Moscow?" John asked Shurin abruptly.

"Eh! when?" He seemed astonished. "Oh! I don't know, the sooner the better, tonight if need be. Mosei Grigorich can fix the passport."

"Well, write that letter now and let me have the money and I'll clear out," John said, still in the same calm voice.

"What, so soon, really? No, wait a bit, wait a bit." Shurin lit another cigarette, nervously surprised.

Again the big man moved, this time towards Shurin.

"Oh! give him the money and let him go, Mihael Leonidich. Get off yourself. You two aren't made for one another's company, any one can see that."

The fact is Shurin had decided in his own mind some days ago that this was what he would do when he left Vladivostok. He merely wished to preserve the decencies by some show of reluctance.

"I'll come down to your office," he answered. "We can do business there more comfortably."

Even so, he was not really expecting that John would move off at once, but no sooner were they out of the room than the boy was on the floor, pulling his things out of a trunk and packing them into a sack. When this brief packing was over John rose with a sigh of relief and went to the window.

It looked out on to a dirty yard. A plump peasant girl, bare-legged, was bending over a tub outside the bathhouse. Her short skirt showed the pink skin of her thighs as she bent over her work. John was suddenly elated, beyond all bounds.

"Heh! Pasha," he called, "your skirt's too short!" She turned round, looked up, saw who it was, and her broad face broke into a smile of red lips and white teeth.

"Sauce!" she called back, and turned again to her work, unabashed.

John turned away, tied up his sack, and almost danced across the little room in the space between the two beds.

Two hundred and fifty dollars! He had been prepared for Shurin to drop him, and even though he hadn't done so he was determined in any case to leave him. But such a fortune had never entered his calculations. Go back to America? Not if he knew it. Back to Murphy and Murphy's girl and a desk in Murphy's dry goods store! No, even if Pete were still alive he wouldn't go back, and Pete would approve. Pete had made a world of his own, where it didn't matter if men were kind or good or beautiful, because Pete was strong enough not to care, because Pete always had hidden resources of strength to fall back upon.

John had no feeling for Shurin. He despised him, and Marusia was dead. She had been too weak, too lonely, with her misty desire for the eternal, her earthly passion for a worthless fool, and the agonizing weaknesses of her flesh. Other people there had been, teachers in the orphanage, officers in the training-cruiser, teachers in the high school, Shurin's friends, Murphy's girl, sturdy acquaintances of his childhood, but none of them had claims on him in any way, except Pete, and Pete was dead, murdered by these same people.

Two hundred and fifty dollars! He could make a world of his own. He could see life on that. All Siberia, forest, steppe and mountain, might be his for the asking. John ran to the window again and sang three lines to Pasha, the refrain of a soldier's song. She turned, and this time she did blush.

"You wait, you little devil!" she cried out warningly.

"Ah! but I'm not going to wait," he told her. "I'm going, I'm going. I'm going to leave you, Pasha, I'm going to leave you now." He sang a verse of the song and Pasha burst out laughing.

"You fancy yourself, don't you?" she grinned at him

again. "Just you wait, my fine young American. I'll put you across my knee!"

"Good-bye, Pasha, proschaitye. Proschai-ai-tye!" he called out, mock tragically, but just then the door opened and the two men re-entered. John turned round. Shurin had a letter in one hand and a bundle of green and orange-backed dollar notes in the other.

"Well, I'm ready," John told them, pointing to the sack.

Shurin gaped, the big man stared. They did not think he had really meant to go at once.

"Not so fast," Shurin began.

"Not fast enough," John interrupted.

"You really mean to go now?" asked the big man.

"Yes."

"But what about your passage? You can't walk straight aboard a ship from this hotel," Shurin objected.

"I can see to that. If you want me to go at all, I'm going now. Otherwise I stay."

Outside the sun was shining, faint sounds of the life of the city came up through the window. You could almost feel the wash of the sea, almost hear the whispering forest, almost see the brooding mountains. Shurin yielded.

"Here you are." He handed over the letter and the money.

"I don't like this, John. Have you forgotten that during more than two years Marusia and I took you in and cared for you?"

"I have not forgotten Marusia. I have not forgotten anything." John stuffed the money away in his belt, holding the letter in one hand, while with the other he picked up his sack. "No, I haven't forgotten anything, Mihael Leonidich. Not even Murphy and his daughter. Good-bye."

With this parting shot he walked out and left them.

His voice had taken on a note new to them. They did not

attempt to stop him. Through the open window came the voice of Pasha singing. Beyond was the noise of the city, the surge of the sea, the song of the forests, the hymn of the mountains, the invitation of the steppes.

"Well, that's a son of a bitch if you like," said Mosei Grigorich, and he followed John out, in accordance with his practice of seeing that none of his guests took more from the hotel than they brought into it. Shurin was left alone, astonished.

CHAPTER II

JOHN went out into the street, his sack on his shoulder, his letter in his hand, his money in his belt, with no idea of whither he should make. His first action was to take the letter unread and tear it into four pieces which he dropped into the gutter. Then he made for the Svietlanskaya, since that was the main street. After all, "Svietlanskaya Ulitsa," "Street of Light," he might get some idea there, and at least it was somewhere.

Fifteen years old, he had the body of a sturdy lad two years his elder, while as for his face it was the face of young Bacchus, of unchanging youth. He was wearing a Russian shirt of white linen, open about his brown neck, a ragged American jacket, a pair of flannel trousers and bare feet thrust into peasant's sandals. On his shoulder the sack, in a pouch at his belt two hundred and fifty dollars, so he set off to discover a new world.

The first thing he thought about his liberation was that he was hungry, so he turned into a restaurant which he found near the foot of the wide, untidy street, at the unfashionable end. It was called "Medvied"—"The Bear," and you went down a flight of steps to enter. A great stuffed bear with outstretched arms greeted him. Behind

the bear he found a white-aproned waiter sitting in a chair at the bar who looked at him malevolently, for he was very early and created unnecessary work.

But John had no intention of seeing the world on an empty stomach, so he sat down at a table, his sack on the floor, and waited to be served. The place was a wide and rambling cellar, vaulted, plastered, and decorated with scenes of a pastoral beauty such as never was on land or sea, painted in faded greens and browns. At one end there was a crazy wooden stage with a piano and a few chairs, having a dingy curtain for a back-cloth. Other parts of the basement stretched off to right and left, but were cut off from full view. This much he took in before the malevolent waiter stirred himself and uttered a malevolent, incomprehensible growl.

This strange sound brought forth a sleepy-eyed Chinaman, who changed the paper which did duty for a tablecloth, brushed off a few crumbs with his apron and stood impassively awaiting his orders. John ordered a borsch and the Chinaman went away without giving any sign that he had either heard or understood.

Whilst he was waiting for the borsch John began to think about the future. Two hundred and fifty dollars. That was the solid fact from which his thoughts began and to which in time they all returned. It was a lot, and it was nothing. A lot for a month or so in Vladivostok, nothing for a prolonged stay in Siberia. What was Siberia anyway? John didn't know. Railway, convicts, gold-mines, forests, steppes, great rivers, mountains, strange sounding names of towns, Chita, Irkutsk, Tomsk, Omsk. That was all he knew.

Just beyond Vladivostok there lay the frontier of the Far-Eastern Republic. Beyond that was the R.S.F.S.R., Soviet Russia, the land of the Bolsheviki, of famine and revolution, a new world, so people said, where disorder

was seeking to find its way to order through new forms. He didn't know. Then there was Moscow. What sort of a place was that? From the little schooling he had had all he could remember was that Napoleon burnt it a long time ago, but it must surely have been built again since then. And Napoleon, who was he, anyway?

He must have spoken Napoleon aloud, for he was suddenly aware of some one standing at his elbow and saying, "Napoleon, who the devil is he? A Turk? Or is he one of these Bolsheviks?"

He looked up. It was a man in a green shirt, with a bald head the shape of an egg and a dirty unshaven face. The man didn't wait for a reply, but jumped on to the stage and began to set the chairs and look through the pile of music on the piano. Just then the Chinaman brought his soup, so John did not trouble to reply to the interrupter of his meditations.

But he looked up occasionally from the hot soup to examine this apparition. For it was an apparition. No other word could describe a man so abnormally thin, who moved about the little stage as though he were a ventriloquist doll on wire springs and not a human being at all. Then the man was wearing pink boots. John looked twice to make sure of this extraordinary detail, but it was really so. His trousers were thrust into a pair of high, close-fitting, pink top-boots, just the colour of sugar icing.

The man suddenly turned on the stage and spoke to John again. "Who are you? You look like a vagabond. I hope you can pay for your borsch." He said this rather as though it were an interesting point, than menacingly.

"I can," John assured him, "easily."

"I asked you," said the man, "because I can't always pay for mine. I find it an awkward situation."

"It must be. What do you do when that happens?"

"Find some one like yourself, who can pay *easily,* and get him to buy it for me."

"I should have thought," said John with interest, "that that was also an awkward business?"

"It isn't, not at all. I am a student of human nature with wide experience. Of course, I know that no man will ever willingly help another one, if it means that there is no hope he will one day have the help returned with interest. But I have a remedy for that."

"What's that?" asked John.

"What applies between man and man does not apply between man and woman. I have a wife."

And the man sprang to the curtain at the back of the stage and pulled it apart in the centre. A woman came through without taking the least notice of him, and sat down at the piano, looking at the music he had just arranged on the rest.

The man turned to her, bowed and said to John with an air of immense pride, "My wife."

John looked at her. She was a Jewess, middle-aged, plump, powdered, her lips painted and her eyes darkened, dressed in a tight black satin gown, which with difficulty confined her ample form. She turned to her husband as she spoke. "Grisha," she ordered curtly, "get off."

With remarkable alacrity Grisha jumped down and came to sit at John's table, while his wife rather hoarsely ventured a worn contralto voice over the notes of a gipsy song.

"You must excuse her," the man said. "You have come at an unlucky moment. Customers are not usually expected about this time. She is rehearsing—an artist."

He had bright, slightly bloodshot blue eyes and a wide loose mouth such as one associates with fallen actors. His nose was thin and broken, his voice shrill.

"I don't mind," John answered. "I came here to eat, but I can stand the music too."

"That's good of you" (a little ironically), "but now perhaps you will tell me, who is Napoleon?"

"Don't you know?" John asked.

"No, why should I? But I like the sound of the name, fantastic, musical—'Na Polye On': in Russian 'He is on the floor.' Now, who is on the floor?"

"Damned if I know." John was becoming a little irritated, though still slightly amused.

"You mustn't get angry because I question you. I was simply thinking that a man with such an interesting name might give me the material for a short dramatic sketch. We are artists, my wife and I. We travel from village to village, from town to town, giving to all the benefit of our talent in magic, sketch and song."

John was a little softened by the explanation. "Well, I don't really know much about him. He was a Frenchman, an Emperor, a long time ago, and he invaded Russia with his army. I think he burned Moscow, and then was defeated and lost all his army after he had conquered half the world."

Grisha's pale eyes lit up. "An interesting character. Now why did he come to Moscow?"

"I don't know; unless it was that he wanted to march into Asia and conquer the East as well as the West."

"That's it, that's it. You've hit it. I knew there was a Turk in the business somewhere. Do you know any intimate details, anything about his private life, for instance?"

"I have heard he had some trouble with his wives, but I don't really know. I guess he must have been pretty fond of women."

"Young man, so am I." His voice fell to a whisper. "And I also have had trouble with my wives, especially this one. I begin to feel some sympathy with this Napoleon. Was his wife a Jewess? A drama is forming in my mind, wait a minute."

He poured out a glass of water, crumbled some black bread and appeared to be thinking deeply.

"I have it," he said at last. "I take the part of the Emperor Napoleon; she," he pointed to the stage, "will be my wife, the Empress. You will be the beautiful daughter of a Grand Duke, whom my soldiers have saved from the flames of Moscow and brought before me, a shrinking and lovely captive. The spoils of war. I woo you. You refuse. I press. You yield, dazzled by my greatness. I promise you kingdoms, the riches of the earth. My wife overhears, she is jealous. She puts poison in your wine. You drink. You die. I come on—despair—fury—love—to cool my burning throat I drink from the cup. I fall—'Na Polye On,'—'He is on the floor.' Enter my jealous wife—sees the great king fallen. In terror she stabs herself. Finis. Melodrama, young man, but good. They will like it in the villages. Better than conjuring and the old woman's songs."

"It doesn't sound so bad," John admitted, carried away by the dramatic gestures which accompanied the narration. "Only I hadn't thought of becoming an actor. You will have to find some one else for the girl's part."

"That's a pity. Hadn't occurred to me, I must say, that you might refuse. As a matter of fact we have lost one of our company. Ditrichs arrested him as a deserter. I believe he shot him. Doesn't matter much anyhow, because he used to pinch the takings to go drinking. But why don't you take up acting? Don't try to make me believe you have a job already, because no one in Vladivostok has; they are all waiting to see what will happen now that the Japanese are going."

"As a matter of fact I haven't," confessed John. He did not want to mention his independent means, and it struck him that the best solution for his difficulties would in any case be to work his way about the world, keeping the cash

as a reserve. "But I don't know that I have any talent for the stage."

"My boy," whispered Grisha, confidentially, "you don't need it, not on our stage. A good presence is all you want, and a gift of the gab. You must bamboozle them. Simple peasants and small townsfolk are all we touch, as a rule. This cabaret is something out of the ordinary. Conjuring, a few songs, a sketch, that's all we do. I must confess our last two sketches have worn a little thin. In the Far-Eastern Republic we do a Bolshevik one—the death of Kolchak. But here in Vladivostok and in the villages around, we have been running 'Lenin the Human Monster' with some success. Napoleon will be a good change and it will do for both audiences. We have to go on tour at the end of the week when our contract is finished here."

"I'll think about it and tell you tonight," John told him.

"Meet my wife now," urged Grisha.

John cast a doubtful eye towards the stage, but did not object.

"Jenny!" the actor called, coaxingly.

The woman stopped playing, the notes died in her throat, and she turned to glare at him, her fingers still on the keys.

"Jenny, my little dove, come and meet this young gentleman. He has consented to put some capital into our enterprise."

John started a little at this assumption, but said nothing. However, its effect on Jenny was electric. She rose, with a smile all of gold and ivory, and came down the steps with a slow dignity becoming her weight, holding out a plump and dirty hand to John.

"My wife, Yevgenia Petrovna," introduced Grisha.

"We shall be charmed to welcome you, sir," Jenny minced, slipping in unnecessary s's to convince him of

her superior refinement, as is the petty-bourgeois way in Russia.

"Charmed to meet you, ma'am. I just had a very interesting chat with your husband, but if you'll excuse me now, I'll go, and return later. Can I leave this here?" John touched the sack with his foot.

"Certainly. I'll put it in our room myself," said Grisha, picking it up.

John thought to himself, "he can smell my dollars," but he kept quiet.

Having paid his bill to the surly waiter he bade them good-bye and went out to the harbour side, determined to think things over before taking any steps to join their company.

CHAPTER III

In America whenever John had wished to think about the future, he made his way to the waterside. In Vladivostok he did the same. There was a peaceful beauty about the Golden Horn, that calm stretch of water above which the wooded mountains rise, which helped him to think more calmly. A Japanese cruiser, two destroyers, British and American, were anchored there, and attracted his gaze for a moment.

He turned his head away and looked towards the wooded slopes above the town. Beyond them lay Siberia, the broad Amur, all kinds of mysteries. Here the Stars and Stripes drooping from the ensign staff of the destroyer reminded him that his old enemies still had a grip on life. High school, Murphy's office, Murphy's girl, parson, sheriff, naval officers, all the crowd of them stood behind that flag. Better quit as soon as possible and see what was going on over the hills.

But how best to do it? The idea of play acting, strolling

from village to village was attractive. Yet what about his companions, Grisha and his fat wife Jenny? John recalled that Grisha had long and pointed ears, a feature which had always filled him with suspicion since earliest childhood, for they had also marked the headmaster of the Seamen's Orphanage. Such ears were signs of a dark and tortuous mind, the kind of mind he associated with teachers and preachers. Still, Grisha seemed harmless enough and he felt capable of dealing with any man who had so weak a mouth. If he were evil he was also affable, and his wife, though yet an untried quantity, might also be managed.

John was sitting at a favourite spot for loungers from the town. The water was still cold, but boys and girls were bathing, their bright bodies splashed in the sun. A few men were sitting and smoking, or reading papers, peasant girls with nothing to do made separate giggling groups. Very few people in Vladivostok seemed to have anything to do.

His eye was caught by a young man standing behind a group of workmen, scanning the foreign warships beneath the shade of his hand. There was something familiar in the slight stoop, the fine aquiline nose, the blue eyes. It was Yasha.

John went up to him, and touched his elbow. Yasha looked at him suspiciously for a moment, and then recognition broke into his eyes.

"My little American John," he cried in English, and hugged him to his breast.

Then he held him at arm's length, and looked him up and down as though he were trying to guess how he got there and what he was doing.

"You are not from the American warship this time? You have not deserted at last?"

John shook his head. "No, let's sit down and talk."

"All right. But don't mention where you met me before, if you're going to talk in Russian, until we are alone. There are quite a lot of inquisitive people in Vladivostok."

"Now," said John, when they had found a quiet spot, "I can tell you everything," and as shortly as he could, though it took nearly an hour, he told him all his life since the memorable day when they met at Tientsin. Yasha asked him many questions, and finally wished to know where Shurin now was and where John was staying. John told him of the morning's meeting in the cabaret and Yasha stroked his unshaven chin meditatively.

"Well, that idea of play acting is a queer one, John, but it might be interesting. There is a lot to see in Siberia. Be sure to go to Baikal. Ai! Ai! Baikal. It is the most beautiful place in the world, the water is so blue, the mountains and forests so grand, the air like wine. The train makes a long stop by the lake and I always get out for a swim, when I am passing. Baikal is my home. It is Michael's too—he is there just now living with his father. We went to school together, Michael and I."

"Things pretty quiet in Siberia now?" John inquired.

"Not so bad. You will see big changes this year in the Far-Eastern Republic. The country round the Amur is still rather disturbed. Since the Japanese have begun to go Ditrichs issues a proclamation each week, saying that he is going to reconquer Holy Russia with sword and cross. Whenever he does that bands of brigands are inspired to burn a few villages or wreck a train. Ai! Ai! they need a strong hand up here on the Pacific coast to clean up all this muck—Ditrichs, Semenoff and the other bandits."

"What are the prospects for an actor?"

"Oh! you may get along without having your throat cut. But listen, John, you can't go on with this acting for too long. What is your real idea?"

"I have none. I want to wander through Siberia, through

Russia. I want to see everything that is going on. I have two hundred and fifty dollars and I can stop acting whenever I want. Perhaps I will come to Moscow and get work there, but I must see the country first."

Yasha stroked his chin again, the smile that was always lurking about his lips broadened a little. The quizzing eyes turned on John.

"I'm afraid you're a good-for-nothing vagabond. But come to me in Moscow if you are there next year and I will help you."

John asked him a question which he had been burning to put for some time. "Look here, Yasha, what are you? What is your work that takes you from Tientsin to Vladivostok and from Vladivostok to Moscow?"

Yasha's smile deepened. Little wrinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes, his whole face was laughing.

"I hold a little brown card," he said. "It takes me into all sorts of queer places, my little brown card."

"And what is your little brown card?"

"You'll find what that little brown card is quick enough when you cross the frontier, but we don't talk about it this side. Ask no questions and you'll hear no lies."

A workman came casually up from behind and tapped Yasha on the shoulder. "It's time we were going along to the meeting, Comrade Schumann."

Yasha did not look up. "Sit down, Yanovsky," he said, and the workman squatted at his side. "I must be going now, John, but we shall meet again. At the beginning of August I shall be in Omsk to take my holiday—a very original holiday, for I am going by caravan to Tashkent. I have had no holiday for two and a half years and this is special leave. If you are in Omsk about that time look me up at this address," and he scribbled an address on a piece of paper and handed it to John. Then he shook his hand.

got up with his companion, and in a minute they were gone.

John walked along the edge of the sea till he had found a quiet spot. He slipped off his clothes and ran into the water, swimming out till he felt tired and then floating slowly to shore on his back.

It was good to be playing in the great Pacific again, as he had done a year ago in America, on the day when Pete was murdered. He had grown a good deal in that time, and he recalled with a smile his fight with the two young swells and their girls. That fight had been the beginning of his real life. It seemed to have started him on his journey across the sea, and now in a day or two he was leaving on another journey, even longer, over an unknown sea of land.

All these things he meditated as he lay drying in the sun. He summed up to himself his chances with Grisha. It would be wiser not to risk too much and he decided to declare his whole capital at twenty dollars, of which he would invest part in the company and keep ten for his own needs.

Then there was Yasha. John wondered why the world was made so that it was only a chance series of meetings and partings. It was wonderful, of course, to have met him again at all, but why should it be for only a few minutes, with no guarantee of permanent friendship? Why had he been able to keep Pete for little over a year? Why was he with the Shurins for only two years? There seemed no permanency about life.

About four in the afternoon he made his way back to the "Medvied," to find three waiters now, instead of one, lolling in front of the bar. One of them came to serve him attended by the same Chinaman, as soon as he sat down at his table. In a few minutes Grisha also reappeared, smiling jovially, and sat down opposite to him.

"Well, have you made up your mind? Are you going to see life with me, young man? I assure you it will be worth your while, whatever you care to invest in our little enterprise."

He tried to make this financial reference very jocular, but John chose to ignore it.

"Yes, I'll come along with you. Can I stay here meanwhile until you are ready to go?"

"Well, it's not a pretty place, though I daresay I can find you a corner. Mankind comes here to be himself, and the spectacle is at times very edifying. I assure you, young man, that if you want to see life as it really is, you have chosen a good spot when you ask to sleep at the 'Medvied.'" He laughed uproariously. "Ha! ha! you'll see how our lords and masters behave. The foreign sailors, the officers of Ditrichs, preparing their souls with fasting and repentance for the reconquest of Holy Russia. Ha ha ha!" The joke seemed too big to be contained in that miserable body, and the egg-shaped head positively shook on the scraggy neck.

John smiled. There was a kind of subtle uncleanliness about Grisha, yet at the same time he was so obviously a fool, a generous, selfish, bitter, shallow fool.

"Let's talk business then, if the sleeping question is settled," John said. "What terms do I come in on?"

"Well, we are a co-operative concern. My wife and I both hold shares. So did my unfortunate partner whom Ditrichs so unkindly disposed of for me. He had twenty-five per cent. of the takings, my wife and I shared the rest. It all depends on what you put in."

John brought out two yellow-backed ten-dollar notes which he had carefully put apart that afternoon.

"I have twenty dollars, I'll put in ten and keep the rest for my own needs in case we are stranded or anything happens."

Grisha stared a little at the American money. "Oh! that's good. Better than Vladivostok paper. Where did you get it?"

"It's my own," John told him. "I'm an American, and came here with returned emigrants. They have left me and these are my savings."

"An American. Ah! I see now why you are such a smart lad. Quite an intellectual! I had been thinking that perhaps you were a Little Russian, from your accent."

"What about my offer?" John asked.

"Hm," Grisha scratched the nape of his neck. "I'll have to see my Jenny about that. We're a devoted couple in some ways. You may have noticed that she is a Jewess. Unfortunately I have always married Jewesses, through no fault of my own. Wait a minute, please."

He went out, returning in about ten minutes.

"Everything is fixed. We accept your offer. Ten dollars down and twenty-five per cent. of the takings. If you come with me I will show you our room."

John paid for his meal and followed Grisha through some dark passages at the back of the restaurant to a stone staircase. They went up this into a dirty corridor. A room at the end was theirs. It was nearly filled by a wooden bedstead, covered with a straw mattress on which Jenny was lying. She yawned when they entered and pointed to the floor.

"If you can get a mattress you may fix it in that corner."

From the bed she smiled ingratiatingly at John. "Our room isn't very grand. But what do you expect with a fool like Grisha for a husband? Why, he hasn't even got a name to bless himself with. Grisha, Grisha, that's all he's ever called. If he wants to know his real name, he has to look on his passport."

John looked at his corner. It was rather dirty, but apart

from that had no positive quality which might distinguish it from any other corner in the world.

"I expect it will suit me well enough, Yevgenia Petrovna," he assured her.

Grisha laughed, the high metallic laugh that was like the cracked notes of a piano-organ trying to sound jovial.

"Ha ha ha! You're not a bag of bones like me, my son. But I expect it *will* suit you. You won't lack bedmates, anyway. Ha ha ha!"

"Shame on you, Grisha. Never mind him, Ivan Ivanich, he's only a poor fool. I don't know why I stick with such a poor thing. He has ruined my talent. I used to get very good engagements before I married him."

"Yes, she got a six months' engagement at the Tsar's expense, oftener than she wanted! We got married when she was fulfilling one of them." Grisha positively chuckled with glee. "Six months sewing canvas bags is a fine thing for developing the talent, my boy. Try it one day, but don't let it run you into marrying a Jewess."

Jenny reached out and slapped him resoundingly, tears of mortification in her eyes. "Get out, you dog." She got up and advanced on him menacingly. He turned and ran behind John, dodging out of the room, his shrill "Ha ha ha!" echoing up the corridor. "Excuse him, young man, he's really half dotty. And excuse me too, if I lie down before the concert begins."

She did not wait for a reply, but flopped on to the bed again. John saw his sack in the corner and sat down on the floor with his back against it. In a minute or two he heard her speak from the bed.

"If you will look on the window-sill, dearie, there's a book. I haven't read it, but I have heard it's very interesting."

John picked it up. It was volume two of the Russian translation of a novel by Dickens—*Barnaby Rudge*. He

read to the accompaniment of the heaving sighs that moved the ample bosom of Jenny, proving that she slept.

CHAPTER IV

THEY stayed at the "Medvied" a few more days. Vladivostok, though ruled by the gloomy fanaticism of Ditrichs, nevertheless did much as it pleased. Occasionally gendarmes, complete with revolver and sabre, penetrated into the restaurant, but beyond taking a drink and exchanging a glance or two with the bright-eyed dancing girls, they took little interest in the place. John came to the conclusion that the General paid a large portion of his Holy army of reconquest from the revenues of this and similar places of diversion. Grisha confirmed him in the view and added that it was moreover certain that if all doubtful places of amusement were closed down, he would lose the support of the Allied Powers, whose naval and military forces would find the town intolerable.

After ten o'clock at night the outstretched arms of the welcoming bear were usually decorated with naval headgear, English, American, or Japanese. The atmosphere was a mist of smoke and liquor fumes, while the little stage was occupied as much by the more fevered members of the audience as by the artists. The gipsy girls, mostly Jewesses, who sang and danced, were tossed about among the enthusiastic clients and from time to time would make long absences from the scene, not unaccompanied. In fact at night the place was little more than a rowdy brothel, and he half suspected that it was also an opium den. Certainly there were seedy individuals selling drugs there almost openly.

John was interested in the gipsies, and often talked with them in the company of Grisha or Jenny. They had their

own view of life, chiefly based on the strength of the sexual need in man, and had many queer stories to tell. One of the girls, a fair, well-built peasant girl called Truhanova, the only pure Russian among them, was the mistress of a young Jewish merchant. She had the best voice of them all, and sometimes when she was singing, the vaulted cellar would become suddenly quiet as her wild song rose above them all, tense with the passion of some romantic gipsy ballad.

As the last note died away the whole drunken crowd used to applaud madly, rattling their plates, ringing the glasses with their knives, toasting her to the dregs. She herself was not in the least passionate, but her singing never failed to rouse them, and after those rare bursts of beauty the place usually became chaos. Sometimes there were fights and men would be thrown violently out. Truhanova used to go behind the curtain and cry when this happened, frightened at the turmoil.

All the girls liked John, and it was not long before Truhanova told him all about herself. The young Jew was going to marry her, and every Sunday she went to call on his family. "They think the world of me, although I am a Christian," she confided to him proudly. "His mother is always telling me she doesn't know another girl like me and that I shall make a splendid wife for Isaac."

"Don't they know what you do?" John asked curiously.

"Oh no! they've no idea and Isaac wouldn't tell them."

"Then he knows?"

"Why, of course. You don't think I would keep him in the dark?"

"No, but it seems rather funny. He doesn't mind?"

She became confidential, explaining in her simple way the intricacies of it all. "Well, it does seem rather queer. But I'll tell you what it is, Vanya, it's because he's a Jew. They've got different ideas from us, the Jews. They don't

think about things the same way at all. Lots of people don't like them for it, but I do."

"Will he be able to keep you?"

"Oh yes. They're quite well off and the old people give me some lovely presents. When Isaac's at home I don't do this sort of thing much, but he often goes away on business to Japan. I always go to see his people though: they think I'm working in an office here. Next year we shall get married and they are going to open a shop for me so that I can help Isaac."

She told it so simply that he could not but believe her, though the story puzzled him, upsetting all his ideas on the normal relations between the sexes. The morning of their departure, as he lay on his mattress in the corner, he questioned Grisha about it.

"Oh, Truhanova," he grumbled, "that silly little bitch will tell you anything."

"But I think it's true," John persisted.

"It is true," Jenny assured them truculently, from her place in the bed next the wall, "and why shouldn't it be? He's a very nice young man and he'll make a good home for her."

"Well, what the hell can you expect from a Jew?" Grisha said, coming at last to a subject which he had very much at heart, that is, the pernicious inferiority of all Jews. "I expect he wants a wife who can make money, and Truhanova's pretty enough to go on making a nice little pile for at least ten years to come."

Jenny poked him hard in the ribs with her elbow, with no more satisfactory result than a grunt.

"You miserable beast. You think every one's as low as yourself. Why shouldn't the girl settle down and have as quiet a home as any woman? You're a grand specimen of a Christian yourself, I must say."

Grisha yawned widely. "Well, if he's a Jew he's not

taking her without some good reason. I must admit they have their heads screwed on. Anyway, a girl who has led her brisk life ought to be able to give him some fun."

John was not satisfied. The matter continued to puzzle him till they got up and busied themselves preparing for the day's journey. According to his experience men and women were queer creatures in their relationships. For instance, why did Shurin and Marusia keep together? They had little happiness and nothing in common, yet she had really loved him, while Shurin had almost appeared to grieve when she had died. At least he showed an emotion as near to sorrow as that remarkable egotist could ever attain. Why were Grisha and Jenny together? From remarks they dropped he gathered that the relationship had lasted a fair time, and though one day it would no doubt break, there seemed a kind of permanency to it. Why did a rich young Jew who could doubtless have married decently in his own race, choose a Christian prostitute for a wife? Certainly it was not through sentiment, but why, why? It was all a mystery. He began to wonder what other mysteries would come to him, dark and intriguing, masking the meaning of life, as they wandered from village to village through Siberia.

Grisha had purchased a peasant cart and an old mare, plump and well preserved beyond her years, but making up for her youthful appearance by a most exasperating indolence. A creature of moods who would shy at a telegraph-pole or stand still in front of a five-kopek piece dropped on the cobble stones, refusing to budge. Yet at other times she proved docile and willing enough. They loaded the cart, a springless tarantass, with their slender properties and personal belongings, hoisted up Jenny, groaning and sighing, and begging them to mind her best and (only) dress, and then clambered up themselves, Grisha taking the reins, since he knew best the route.

As they jogged along northwards out of the town John had time to meditate upon his companions, and since he had now spent some days in their company he had rich material at his disposal. The second day Grisha had enlarged upon his cryptic reference to their marriage in prison.

"Prisons at that time, under the Tsar, weren't managed like they are today; not in Siberia. It was a kind of casual cell with men and women mixed together, where we met. The warders were casual too; they didn't mind what went on so long as they weren't worried. Quite a lot of us got married on that same night as Jenny and myself." And then he had laughed, "Ha ha ha!" while Jenny, who was lying on the bed in a shift and torn silk petticoat, had cried out in mock modesty, "Now, Grisha, how can you? You know it wasn't like that at all!"

But John guessed that it was, or at least near enough not to matter.

Grisha had taken no notice of her protest. "The only difference, Vanya, was this, that the others got Christians, but I, with my damned luck, must drop on a Jewess in the dark. And then their marriages were not so permanent as mine. I was so overcome by the shock when light came and I saw what an oriental beauty I had taken that I have never been strong enough since to get rid of her." And he had laughed once more, shrilly like a parrot, "Ha ha ha!"

Grisha was a peasant, turned out of his village for some petty crime of his youth, and had led a wandering vagabond's life for years, actor, witch-doctor among the Tungus and Buriat tribes, charlatan, thief, anything that meant an easy living. He had no virtues, and recognized none in others. His only honesty lay in despising himself for a certain weakness of character which he considered had prevented him from rising in the world to the possession of

that wealth whence others were enabled to gratify the universal desires for drink and women.

Very early he had guessed that John must have money in the belt which he watched so carefully, and he explained to him quite frankly that he must be sure to keep it out of his sight. He told him that when a thing was lying before his eyes he could not help but take it, and that though, on the whole, he did not consider himself to be a thief, it was certainly unfair to tempt him.

"I have tried stealing, Vanya, and got stripes and verminous prisons in return for very little money. I hadn't enough education to steal in style like a bourgeois. Besides, once begun where was I to stop? The thing would have become a burden to me."

"What do you mean?" John had asked him. "Surely you would stop as soon as you had as much as you wanted."

"And when was I to have that, please? Desire breeds desire, my boy. From drinking samagonka I would have gone on to champagne, from whores I would have progressed to generals' daughters, from generals' daughters to grand duchesses. In the end nothing would have satisfied me but to sleep with the Tsarina herself. Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you preferred to stay poor?"

"Put it that I was afraid to become rich. With a little more courage I might have been Rasputin himself, as good as an emperor, or better, since it was he that ruled the rulers. As it is I am a miserable swine of a strolling actor, with a Jew bitch for a wife. Your money is safe from me so long as I don't see it. If I take it I know it will only bring me misfortune, and I shan't be able to resist if you show it to me, but so long as you keep it hidden in that belt I shan't have the guts to steal it. It would only lead me on to more and worse. Besides, Jenny would scratch my eyes out. She is in love with you already. Not

that I care; you can have her whenever you want, and I wish you joy."

John would not have said that Jenny was actually in love with him, but she certainly had a warm place for him in her tender heart. He discovered this as the days passed on and they trundled in their cart from village to village through the Amur province. She would sit in the back of the cart, in her tight black silk dress with the low neck which was so shocking to the strait-laced Cossacks. In her lap was a torn silk vanity-bag from which she was everlastingly pulling out a little round, cracked mirror. Into this she would stare for long periods, powdering her pallid cheeks, rouging her thick lips, or lining her dark eyes with a pencil. When she had finished, she would call to John walking by the side of the cart.

"Vanya, my darling, how do I look? Don't you think that's charming?"

"As lovely as an Indian maiden," he would assure her, for Jenny had early decided that John, coming from America, must have spent his youth among lovely Indian maidens, and he had accepted the illusion without protest. Grisha did not take her preenings so gallantly.

"Ah! you old whore!" he would say, in his harsh metallic voice, like the ring of bad coin.

She never took much notice of him. Indeed, the words were a kind of marital caress to her, and meant as much, or as little.

They made for the larger villages, sometimes sleeping in the cart, sometimes in barns, sometimes in the hut of a hospitable peasant eager to hear bragging tales of great doings in the world beyond. Their show never varied, and was always successful. Conjuring tricks by Grisha, with John as assistant, disappearing coins, fire-swallowing, card tricks, juggling with coloured balls, easy deceptions that made the mixed audiences of Cossacks, high-cheeked

Buriats and Tunguses, and even Chinese, gape with wonder at their magic; songs by Jenny; funny stories by Grisha, of which John was often the butt; and lastly the wonderful sketch—"Death of Napoleon, Emperor of the World."

The performances took place in a barn or in the People's House, if one existed, and chairs were hunted up from all over the village to seat the spectators. Grisha, because of his pink boots, his bird-like humorous face that always twinkled so in company (though John had seen the expression quickly replaced by a peevish snarl if anything happened to irritate him) was always master of the village during his stay. In those moments even Jenny would look at him with something like admiration in her eyes. He was cheerful, commanding, with a merry quip for every one and a smile that should have ravished the heart of every village girl.

John got to know the Siberian peasants during these journeyings, and the knowledge did not discomfort him, like the knowledge he had gained in Vladivostok, or from some of the wayfaring tales of Grisha and Jenny. Their company would be eagerly questioned as soon as they arrived in a village, and from these questions he began to gather that something was happening in this country in which all these people were taking an active part. Had the Japanese left the country? Was Ditrichs still winning in Vladivostok? Was it true that the Bolsheviks were going to buy tractors for the peasants in Russia? Was the famine quite over? What was the meaning of such and such a debate in the assembly at Chita? Had they heard any news of changes in the capital? And so on.

Between village and village was the Amur country. Sometimes they followed the course of the great river itself, which swept along like a master, a moving sea between high forest-crowned bluffs, or rolling over broken

steppes. The sun would sink in golden streaks behind the dark silent forests, grand and gloomy walls of pine; or magnificently it would disappear in violent hues of purple, gold and crimson, behind the mountain peaks, and songs of beauty would rise in John's breast and choke unachieved in his throat. Sometimes he could not bear to look at all the broad magnificence of the country as he drove the mare over the hills or through the whispering forest. In those moments even the obscenity of Grisha could not disturb him, not even when the owner of the pink boots and the shrill voice would explain to his large-bosomed wife, "Our boy's getting moony, Jenny. You aren't enough for him. He needs some sweet young girl to sigh to."

As dusk descended over the country and the sound of the mare plodding over the earthen road, neighing bravely at the freshness of the night, was the only one to break the stillness, or perhaps some dark night bird calling raucously from the leaning trees, then John would hear a sudden shrill echo behind him, and that harsh metallic "Ha ha ha!" and followed by some such remark as "We'll find you a nice plump morsel, when we reach Sorochenskoie tonight, my boy. You shan't go to bed lonely."

CHAPTER V

For nearly a month, from the middle of May to the first week in June, they wandered pleasantly about the Amur province, the presence of Jenny adding a kind of grotesque domesticity to their gipsy life. Even when she held a frying-pan over a camp fire in the forest she contrived to look the middle-aged Jewish woman of the towns, a fourth-rate café singer. She never changed the black satin dress, with the low neck, on which her ample form put such a strain, and her face was always powdered

and her lips rouged. She was tender-hearted, John discovered, but very business-like, and it was always she who took the money at their shows. She kept it too, thereby preventing Grisha from going off too often to muddle his head with home brew.

From time to time in the villages they heard rumours of bands of roaming partisans, relics of the broken White armies who were still lingering in the remoter forests, or on the mountain slopes. But they had so far encountered nothing untoward and all was peace, though once, indeed, they came at night to a barricaded village wherein they only entered with difficulty and might well have been shot in the attempt had not Grisha been known to the peasants from a previous visit.

It proved to be a false alarm, and after three days' stay they passed on to their next stage, a half-Chinese village built upon a bluff above the river, with the strangest medley of inhabitants, Chinese, Manchurian, Mongol, Tungus, and half-caste Russian. John had grown accustomed to these Asian spectators, who watched with unconcealed awe the magic of Grisha, and in complete ignorance of what it was all about witnessed the stormy loves and deaths of Napoleon, Emperor of the World. They had a kind of Eastern music for these performances, when Jenny squatted on the stage and beat a monotonous tom-tom, Grisha intoned strangely what he declared were Eastern songs, while John, dressed as a girl, danced sinuously.

Perhaps it was really Asiatic, at least the audience never failed to respond rapturously. Sometimes Grisha could persuade them to take part in the performance, and then the weirdest medley of sounds would tear the thick air in the long mud hut, Chinese pipas, triangular and strangely shaped, the two-stringed guitars of the Mongols, and plaintive reed pipes tore and sobbed and wailed in the half-darkness, while shrill voices rose and fell tunelessly,

sadly, catching at John's very heart, but producing no visible emotion on the rows of high-cheeked, flat, impassive faces of the men and women who sat listening, betraying that they heard only by a slight swaying of the body from the hips. The half-dozen kerosene lamps were hardly enough to pierce the thick gloom, though here and there they cast a yellow sickly light on the carven faces of a wooden gravity, with narrow eyes beneath deeply folded lids which just reflected a faint glow of intense life where by chance they caught the full reflection of the lamp.

In the day-time John wandered through the village, noting the wooden carving of the little Buddhist temple, the charms that hung outside the doors of the huts and the round black tents of the Mongol herdsmen. This was a life he had never dreamed of before. Not even in Tientsin, nearly three years ago, had he seen anything so strange, so old, and yet so certainly masking a life that was interesting, that was not to be merely laughed aside as quaint because it was so primitive. After all, in the Russian villages he had seen ancient, bearded peasants, their unwashed limbs covered by a ragged sheepskin, who were quite as superstitious and ignorant as these people. One day not long ago they had come by mistake upon a village of Old Believing Cossacks, and had had to fly for their very lives from the dogs that were set upon them. At least these people were not fanatics, and he soon discovered that in these Chinese villages all the religions of the world slumbered peaceably together, Christian, Buddhist, Muhammadan, and Pagan Shamanist.

As they were leaving this village soon after sunrise a young Chinese came up to them, a burly youth with a wild shock of black hair which gave him the appearance of a head-hunter. He spoke in broken and almost unintelligible Russian, but at last they gathered from him that he was wanting to warn them of the existence of a band of parti-

sans in the neighbourhood. They had looted a village forty versts to the north. He was positive of this, but could not tell them in which direction the band was moving.

In their journeys they had sometimes come upon traces of the work of these White bands, or of the Japanese occupation. They were too far from the railway to see the evidence of the devastation wrought by that international army of brigands which swept over Siberia like a swarm of locusts during the intervention, Czechs, English, French, Americans, Japanese and White Russians. Here in the depths of the country all that they saw was an occasional burnt-out village, or a few charred embers in a forest-clearing, and once a whole village standing unharmed but absolutely deserted at the foot of some bare hills on the Steppe. The grey wooden huts had an eerie look, no smoke was curling from the stoves, not even a half-starved mongrel prowling on the outskirts. They had given it a wide berth.

John felt a little excited at the Chinaman's warning. Of all the similar rumours they had heard this was the most definite. He was driving and flung a question over his shoulder at Grisha.

"What do you think of it? Is it a rumour, or shall we meet them maybe?"

"I don't know. Who can tell? I have met them before and it's nothing to worry about. We'll give them a performance and get off all right. I know them—scum. If you have any money, or a pretty girl, or you are a Communist, then look out!"

"Well," said Jenny rather tartly, "what about me? Do you think it's going to be very nice for a woman to be among all those godless bandits?"

Grisha roared with laughter. "Listen to that, Vanya! Listen to the old woman! You'd think she'd never been in such a position before. You'd think she was some high-

breasted young virgin! Ha, ha, ha! That's the best you've said today, my little darling. But they don't like the Jews. Oh! you had better look out for yourself, Jenny dear, they don't like the Jews!"

John heard two resounding slaps from behind, but he knew that Jenny was not concerned so much about her virtue as about their cash box. He himself felt no uneasiness, for he thought his dollars would be safe enough.

"What shall we do though if we should come across them?" he asked.

"Why, just the same as we always do," said Grisha. "If we can get them in a pleasant frame of mind there's no reason why we shouldn't even make something out of giving them a show."

They went on.

That night they arrived at Ephimovka, a village on the edge of the forest, some thirty versts from the river. They found the people in a state of alarm, for the bandits had been seen quite close. It was clear they would be in no mood for a spectacle until the danger was past. Some of the younger peasants were cursing, saying that it was time the Republic joined the R.S.F.S.R. and they had the Bolsheviks to make things safe. There was one Communist in the village, the Secretary of the Council, a loose-built young fellow of about thirty, with a close-cropped fair moustache and rather amused, very penetrating grey eyes. He had sent word to the troops in the district town, but they were getting reports from all over of the nearness of the bandits, and there was nothing to make them fear a descent on Ephimovka more than on other villages. The commandant's advice had been to clear off into the woods at the first warning.

"The devil of it is," the young Communist said, "we shan't get any warning."

John noticed that the people all turned naturally to this

young man for advice in their trouble. "Tell us what we can do, Sasha," they were saying. An old man lying on top of the stove in the council-room was grumbling. "What can Sasha do, what does Sasha know? He's only a boy, he's only a boy." He grumbled incessantly.

Sasha turned to him at last, not angrily, but smiling. "Well, what's your advice, daddy? You've got plenty to say about me. I suppose you'd have us all go to the church and ask the Pope to pray?"

The old man looked over the top of the stove and glared at him through a tangle of falling hair and beard. "Ah, that's it. Now you're making a mock of the church. What harm did religion ever do you, you young pup, can you tell me that? Your Bolshevism isn't going to keep them away. Go and pray to Lenin, but it won't help you like praying to God, it won't help you like praying to God!" He fell back on the stove after this and bothered them no more.

Sasha turned briskly to the little crowd of peasants. "Listen, comrades. It is no use our resisting them. It will only mean that we shall be burned in our huts and they will carry off the girls. We must put scouts in the woods, and should we get word of them send a messenger to the town for the cavalry. If we simply go away into the woods they will burn the village and steal all they can find. If we drive off our best cattle into hiding and then wait and face them boldly here we shall at least save the village. I think we had better wait. Is that agreed?"

They all cried "Agreed," whether they were members of the council or not, and soon Sasha was busy choosing men to take away what cattle were to go into hiding, picking his scouts, and posting men round the approaches to the village. He chose his messenger and they took for his use, after violent protests from the owner, the best horse in the village.

"It's fifty versts to the town," he told Grisha. "The

messenger can't get there in under four hours, for it's rough going, and he'll likely take five, though he's a good lad on a good horse. And then you can count another five hours before the troops can get here—that would be the worst, but we had better calculate on it. It means they have about nine hours' clear mischief if they come. As likely as not they'll have done their worst and cleared off long before ever the cavalry get here."

It was then that John had an inspiration. "But if we give them a spectacle, brother, might not that help to keep them until the troops are here?"

Sasha looked at him for a moment as though he were talking nonsense, then his face cleared and he smiled.

"It might be, it's worth trying. Anything's worth trying except praying," and he cast a sly glance at the old man on the stove. It had its effect. The bearded head popped up over the edge again, and glared malevolently at him. "That's like you, Sasha, you were always a fool. First it was girls, then Bolshevism, and now it's play-actors. Are Jews and play-actors to be a better protection than prayers in God's house? All right, have your way. We shall burn in our beds and the Lord knows it will be deserved. Ai gospodi, what sinful fools!"

Sasha grinned. "It's daddy Sidkin. He's president of the village council. He's not such a bad sort really, are you, daddy?"

"Sinful fool, sinful fool," was the only answer from the stove.

Jenny was taken with John's idea. It meant that they might make money whether the bandits came or not, and was an incentive to the people at least to let them get the hall ready. At the thought that they would not lose the performance she lost all fear of possible outrage from the bandits, about which she had grumbled incessantly ever since the little dispute with Grisha on leaving the Chinese

village that morning. In a moment she was all smiles, and asking Sasha for particulars of what hall they might use the following night, where chairs were to be got, and whether he thought they might put up the prices owing to the uncertain nature of the probable audience, or whether, on the other hand, they should cut them because of the quantity.

Sasha was not long in getting them what they wanted. They said nothing to the people in the village about their plan, but it seemed to have spread from the council-room, and they found chairs and benches came willingly to furnish the long log hut in which the spectacle was to take place.

By nine at night all was ready and the three pilgrims sought their rest undisturbed by dreams of violence, though over the village there had settled an expectant gloom.

The bandits came about ten the next morning. They came riding carelessly through the forest and there was more than half an hour's warning for the messenger who went speeding off to the town. Two officers rode at the head of them in khaki uniforms, and in files of three the tatterdemalion bandits trailed in behind. One officer was riding without a cap and he had a square shaven head, with a misshapen nose, and a hard projecting jaw. His eyes were blue and twinkled jovially, but John standing watching him as he blew kisses at the solemn, terrified peasant girls, thought he was the military brute incarnate.

The second officer, who seemed to be in command, was a tall, thin, melancholy man, with a pointed brown beard and dreamy eyes. He looked neither to right nor left, but crossed himself as he drew level with the church, which his companions neglected to do. The troop numbered about eighty, with rifles slung over their shoulders, sabres hanging at their sides, a brown and ragged crew, unshaven, their horses shaggy and ungroomed, sacks of fodder hang-

ing behind their saddles, belts full of cartridges strapped about them, cooking utensils carelessly tied with string on to odd bits of saddlery. Many of them were barefooted, and even the best pair of boots could not boast of unpatched uppers.

Their eyes were bold and roving. Some of them sang. Some flung cheery remarks at the sullen villagers as they rode on. Two waggons followed behind in which were machine guns; three others, full of miscellaneous equipment, closed the procession.

They rode on through the village, the peasants closing in behind and following silently, as though drawn by a magnet. At the big open space in front of the Zemstvo building, the bearded officer whispered a word in the ear of the shaven officer, who in his turn bawled out sharp orders to the troops. They divided into two and drew up in double lines facing one another at each end of the Zemstvo building. The bearded officer dismounted and climbed the steps to the little porch, while the other held his horse. Still following silently, irresistibly drawn on, the crowd pressed in between the lines of horsemen till a sharp command from the shaven officer caused the front rank, among whom were Grisha, Jenny and John, to recoil and bring the whole mass to a halt, confusedly.

A hush fell. The bearded officer was going to speak.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN noticed that his knuckles showed white as he gripped the rail in front of him. His voice was very low, and the people at the back of the crowd, being unable to hear, pressed forward a little, so that the shaven-polled officer, who was now holding a great automatic, had to shout menacingly at them to keep back. At this they stood

fast, listening, but hearing nothing, while the bearded officer went on, in a voice that seemed hardly more than a sinister whisper.

He had not much to say. "This village is occupied by the troops of His Majesty the Emperor. The president and secretary of the Zemstvo" (he used the old word), "will come to me immediately and receive my orders for the conduct of the villagers and the quartering of the troops. Any disobedience will be treated as rebellion against the will of the Emperor."

When he had finished he went inside, where the shaven man shortly followed him, after he had given orders to the troops to dismount. Sidkin, the old peasant, and Sasha went into the office, and John saw that Sasha's face was very grim and that in place of the good-humoured glint in his eyes there was a kind of hard stare.

They came out presently with the shaven officer, who was positively beaming all over his square and angular face. The officer called together his N.C.O.'s and busied himself with setting the pickets around the village. Sasha stood on the porch, gripping the rail just as the bearded man had done, so that his knuckles showed white, and spoke to the villagers. He seemed to be making a tremendous effort to control himself, and the words came out in sharp, staccato sounds, like rifle-shots. He, too, was brief.

"Brothers, you had better go quietly to your homes. The soldiers are going to make the usual requisitions. I advise you to give quietly whatever is asked of you and to keep absolute silence towards these uninvited guests, whatever they say or do."

The good-humoured officer, who happened to be passing, looked up at him, smiling broadly. "Come, come, my lad. Uninvited guests! That is no way to look upon the soldiers of your sovereign. Where's your sense of duty?

Now I advise you all to be as cheerful as you can, seeing that for today at least you are delivered from the tyranny of the atheist republic. The ladies especially must be pleasant."

He spoke the last words with sly emphasis, but there was absolute silence for a moment and then, right under his nose, was heard an extraordinary, harsh, metallic laugh—"Ha ha ha!"

Even the officer looked surprised, and stared a little darkly at Grisha, for it was he who had laughed, but evidently he saw something in the comedian's face to amuse him, for he laughed also.

"That's right, my lad, laugh! You at least are a loyal subject of the Tsar."

"Ha ha ha!" laughed Grisha again.

"That was a good one, colonel, 'especially the ladies.' We can all see you're regular ladies' men, you and your brave fellows."

"Who are you?" the officer asked curiously.

"Oh! I'm a comedian, your Excellency; it's my business to laugh. If you like to bring all these brave saviours of our country to our spectacle tonight we shall be delighted to entertain you. My wife"—Jenny curtsied—"my leading man"—John bowed gravely—"and myself. The Three Graces is an entertainment of magic, song and drama. An excellent diversion, your High Excellency."

The officer, standing with his legs apart, his Mauser still in his hand, listened with interest. Then he actually put the pistol away and lit a cigarette.

"That certainly sounds interesting. Unfortunately we expect to leave you early this afternoon."

"That can be arranged, Excellency. We can start our spectacle at any time. The hall has been already prepared for a performance tonight."

"Well, well, we'll see. I daresay the boys would like a

little diversion, but food and clothing first, then we can arrange for the mind and spirit. Now run along, all of you. Back to your houses."

He spoke like a benevolent father, but the people needed no urging to hurry to their homes. The soldiers piled their rifles and sabres, watered their horses, and then dispersed through the village, "in search of amusement," and the grim sounds that came occasionally from the huts seemed to show that some of them at least were getting it. A small party remained under arms for requisitions and to bring in selected peasants for a little examination "into the state of the village," as the bearded man phrased it.

John did not go in. He sat outside the school opposite the Zemstvo house, watching the comings and goings of the bandits, vaguely wondering if the schoolmistress, the priest's daughter, whom he had seen the night before, was one of those providing "amusement" for the soldiers of God and the Tsar, or if she would be safe with her father.

He sat there for a couple of hours while the loot was carried into the square by the exhilarated soldiers. They brought cattle and sheep for slaughter, horses for remounts, bags of flour, boots, clothes, little articles like clocks, or watches and money from the houses of the richer peasants. Samagonka appeared from nowhere, and long before their meal was ready the larger part of them were very happy indeed.

John spoke to a couple, one tall and thin, the other short and broad, who urged him to join their band. It was a free and merry life, they said. Shaven-poll was a good sort, an old officer who understood men. As for the bearded commander, he was an ex-solicitor and religious, but a devil in a fight—and perhaps it was just as well that he was strict, for they were a mad lot of wags. So they concluded philosophically, and asked him questions about

the show, which he answered readily, hoping to interest them.

About noon he noticed great animation opposite. An armed party appeared with shaven-poll at the head, and set off at the double across the square. In about half an hour they returned, bringing with them a prisoner whom the officer was beating about the head and shoulders with the butt of his pistol. To his horror John recognized Sasha, the secretary of the council.

Sasha made no sound as they pushed him along, and it was impossible to see what was in his face, for it was streaming with blood. The two troopers who had been talking to John exchanged glances. "Looks as though they'd got one," said the tall man. "Knew there was something nasty in this village," said the short man. And they moved off to watch through the windows. John was not allowed near, but in a few minutes the two officers came out, and Sasha, his hands bound behind his back, was marched off to the outskirts of the village by a small party, shaven-poll still genially beating him with the pistol butt. A volley floated to John's ears down the straggling street, and presently the party came back—without Sasha.

John felt a little sick. He remembered Pete. The thought of the performance that afternoon came to him, and made him feel a little light-hearted. He got up and crept away, hoping through clenched teeth that the soldiers would come in time and that shaven-poll and his bearded friends might get their deserts.

He found Grisha and Jenny in the People's House sitting on the little stage. They were eating, but he could touch nothing. He lay down in a corner, felt very tired, and went to sleep.

He was roused by Grisha poking him with his foot. "The show is on, Vanya. Get dressed. They will be here in a quarter of an hour."

He put on an old black coat and a black mask, his "costume" for the magic portion of the show, and waited, feeling he should not be able to utter a word. Grisha told him he had found some Mongols and a Chinaman among the bandits whom he had persuaded to take part in the "oriental diversion." He was afraid they might be too drunk, but still the audience were not in a condition to be critical. They would make the programme as long as they could, though Grisha did not see how they could manage more than three hours. That would only bring them to about seven, and the cavalry could hardly arrive by that time. Still they must hope. It all depended on how the messenger had ridden his horse. If once the bandits got clear of the village their fresh horses would enable them to avoid pursuit.

By the time he had finished these explanations Jenny had taken her place at the door, optimistically expecting to collect the money. In two's and three's and then in larger parties, the troopers began to stroll in, jesting obscenely as they passed her by upon the qualities of Jewesses. One or two pushed old Tsarist rouble notes into her hands. Some of them kissed her, none of them paid. Last of all came the two officers and sat down in front.

Magic on a bright summer afternoon is a disheartening business, but somehow they got through with it, perhaps because the audience had eaten and drunken too much to be critical. Shaven-poll slept, snoring majestically, and John's eyes were drawn as though fascinated to the black revolver butt he could half see under the unfastened flap of his holster. The bearded officer leaned back, looking straight before him, taking no notice of what was passing on the stage, so that John got a notion he must be praying to himself.

After a while he shook off the weight that felt to press down upon his eyes and entered briskly into the spirit of

the performance. They dragged it out as much as they could, exchanging jokes with the hilarious troopers over disappearing watches. Jenny's songs were received with great applause, and many crude invitations to leave her egg-faced husband, which she coyly refused. At the Oriental Diversion John noticed a faint surprise, and then a kind of interest awake in the commander's eyes as he heard the throbbing of Jenny's drum. Only one of the Mongol soldiers helped them, singing some tuneless songs to the accompaniment of his two-stringed balalaika. Then they had an interval to prepare for the "Altogether Astonishing Tragedy of the Love and Death of Napoleon, Emperor of the World," as Grisha introduced it.

At the sound of the word "Napoleon" the shaven-poll woke up and shouted to them to hurry up, as he liked drama and loved Napoleon. Instead of the usual ten they dragged out the interval to twenty minutes, and then were forced to appear, for the soldiers were threatening noisily to burn down the hall. The drama was a huge success with all except the officer who loved Napoleon. He kept interjecting angrily, "What stuff! What bloody rot! You don't understand the character. This isn't history, you damned fools." However, the rank and file were pleased and the commander had fallen in upon himself again. The performance concluded at half-past six and the commander gave Grisha ten roubles for the actors, as well as a peasant's watch, looted that afternoon.

The sun was sinking when the bandits collected in the square in response to the commander's whistle. A few of the peasants came out to watch, solemnly, for the news of Sasha's murder had spread, and even those who hated the Communists resented it. They were whispering one to another that the rich peasant whose horse had been taken by the messenger had betrayed him. But on the whole they

were relieved that they had escaped so lightly—only one man killed, most of their wives and daughters unharmed, and if the booty was heavy there were no smoking huts to mark the invaders' departure.

John, who stood watching, felt his heart beating almost uncontrollably. Was Sasha going unavenged? Such a big, generous fellow. Was Pete to go unavenged? For he felt that the avenging of Sasha might atone a little for the murder of Pete.

The booty was packed in two commandeered carts, the old horses turned loose, the fresh ones saddled, and then the machine guns withdrawn from each corner of the irregular village square.

In a few minutes the outposts and pickets would be falling in on the main body. The very air seemed to sigh with suspense, so that when the awaited shot came at last, John hardly heard it; he was listening so intently that his mind hardly seemed in his body, the shot itself did not seem real, it might have been a twig snapping, so far away and other-world did it come to him.

It was real enough to the men in the square, and to the watching peasants who slipped into their huts like rabbits into holes. The bearded commander was on his horse in a moment, shouting his orders with a fury that was unbelievable in so silent a man. The men were mounted, the machine guns trained once more, almost before a regular volley had time to follow after the signal shot, rattling through the still air.

The pickets came galloping in from all sides, and John saw one of them fall as he came tearing down the village street, apparently struck by an unseen hand. It was the first and last he saw of the fighting, for Grisha's hand dragged him hastily into the yard of the house by which he was crouching. It was all over in a quarter of an hour.

Some shouting, a few fevered bursts from the machine guns, rifle shots that seemed to be coming from all sides, and then a swift thunder of hoofs.

When the villagers came out at last, cautiously, fearfully, as though to see the damage wrought by some sudden hurricane passing over their fields, they were able to watch the commander of the partisans, haggard in the dusk, his two eyes burning like coals, brought in by three troopers, driven along like a captured thief. They stared at him, darkly, but no cry came from them, no shout of hatred, till only one woman, watching the party walk round a crumpled, forlorn khaki figure that was lying all huddled in the grass, screamed at him "Svorloch!" and a kind of sigh went round as though the oath had relieved them all of a heavy burden.

The prisoners were shut in the schoolroom, the wounded laid out on straw in the People's House, empty now of the chairs which had seated the marauders during the afternoon spectacle. The dead were laid out in a shed, pathetic, clay-like mummies, all distorted by their wounds. In a clearing at the edge of the wood they found Sasha's body, torn with the bullets, blood on his bruised cheeks and yellow moustache, and his empty eyes when they picked him tenderly up reflected the red fire of the torch which the soldiers held over him.

By nine o'clock the village was cleared of all signs of the fight, the last pursuing parties had returned with their prisoners and the bivouac fires were lit in the square.

John went out to sit with the soldiers, now contentedly cooking their supper over the great fires, exchanging chaff with the girls, and singing their choruses. The commander, a round rosy-cheeked young peasant, with his cap pushed back from his shining brow, was sitting before one of the fires, very content with his success and singing. He sang the bass part, another took up the tenor, and the group

round the fire, with the power and purity which only the Russian soldiers have, carried up the chorus and sent it echoing round far into the starlit night.

"We, the folk of all nations and lands," John caught, low and deep, then the chorus rose, slowly and majestically, swelling like the march of irresistible armies, "the decisive, last fight is our fight!" then the round-faced, wide-eyed commander, the glow of the fire on his ruddy peasant cheeks, was singing the bass part in a voice that rang like beaten bronze, "O'er the world racked with clouds and with smoke, break the red camp fires of freedom," and so till the last terrific crash of men's voices, "the decisive last fight is our fight," then triumphantly, "Death to world capital's power!"

John did not go to sleep for a long time that night. He lay in the forest outside the village, till all sound had died, the last note of song, the last throb of the balalaikas, the last friendly shout of the tired soldiers. He was thinking of Pete, and Sasha, who had reminded him so much of Pete. As he thought he grew less sad, for he was beginning at last to feel that maybe people did not die for nothing, that life which had seemed so meaningless ever since that awful night when Shurin had burst into the house, half crazed with fear by the things which he had seen, was not without some purpose.

It came to him as a little comforting thought, not yet as a conviction, or as complete knowledge. On the contrary, for though the thought was there, it was not yet so strong in his mind as Shurin, as Marusia, as Grisha, as Jenny. What were they all? Lonely pilgrims, pigmy egotists, forbidden by their very natures from ever mixing in some general human purpose. He thought of all the people in the American city, creeping to their work by day, creeping back each into his little home at night, each to his own woman, and staying there, each with his own little

thoughts, till it was time to creep out again into the light of day, to work for no reason save to live, to live for no reason save to work. And Pete had seemed free of that; though John never knew why. Pete was murdered before he had time to discover the reason. He had seen Sasha murdered that afternoon and Sasha's death had recalled Pete to him. Yet strangely enough Sasha's murderers seemed also to have some reason for their being; life with them could not be so bad; they seemed to be together, fighting for some purpose. Then the images of shaven-poll and the bearded solicitor came to him. They were separate from their own men! Not a part of them, but the same lonely, selfish individuals as all the others, Shurin, the Americans, Grisha.

The singing soldiers, the round-faced commander. Now they were all part of one another, Sasha's avengers, Pete's avengers, and John already knew enough to understand that the revenge was not merely the crude one of shooting the ex-solicitor, but something beyond that, something strange and new.

He lay on his back beneath the gently-sighing pines, and all around young fresh scents of the summer earth rose up in the blue darkness. Somewhere in the forest a nightingale awoke to passionate singing. And suddenly John began to sob, terribly, uncontrollably, so that for the first time in his life bitter, incomprehensible pain gripped and shook him. In the invisible night the bird's song trembled through the whispering trees and the scent of summer earth was mingled with the bitter odour of young blood. It rose and choked John, choked him with sobs of pain, the smell of young blood mingled with the scents of the summer earth.

The bird's song ceased. The boy lay there in silence, sobbing no more, but new unknown feelings had taken hold of him; desire of life, the urge of love, rose upper-

most, and as he lay his young body trembled with the pain and loveliness of new thought.

CHAPTER VII

EARLY in July they set off to Chita in order to get documents enabling them to travel in the R.S.F.S.R. These they hoped to obtain without any difficulty owing to the part they had played in the destruction of the partisan force. To get there they had to sell the old mare and the cart and pack themselves into a cattle truck which rattled westward for a week on the end of a long freight train. Half the cars were filled with little families like their own, who ate, slept, quarrelled, made love, produced children and kept farmyards with a fine indifference to the limitations of space and privacy.

They spent hours in sidings, and once a whole day, every time their engine was changed. All kinds of people joined them in their car, each with a sack, a water-melon, a kettle, a hunk of black bread and a pocketful of sunflower seeds, whose husks soon carpeted the floor of the truck like pine needles in an autumnal forest. They mingled their stale scent with the smell of mahorka tobacco to produce a decayed, all-pervading odour which henceforth clung to John wherever he went as something deeply, essentially Russian, Russian of the peasant.

Soldiers, speculators, vagabonds, but above all patient, little-speaking peasants, men and women, brown and rather ragged, were their companions. Jenny by virtue of her black satin dress, Grisha because of his pink boots, kept them an ample corner clear for their little life on the journey. Quarrels were not infrequent and John noticed that Grisha, though always very free of menaces when good humour failed him, never offered to fight unless it

were against some one even more unwilling than himself to come to blows.

At such times there was no containing the scorn, the vituperation, he would pour upon his enemy. The oaths flowed from his thin lips like mud from a sewer in a thunderstorm, he positively trembled, so violent did he become with sincere indignation. When the storm had passed he rarely forgave, though he was too weak-willed to pursue vindictiveness further than occasional contemptuous and gross reference. John also had quarrelled with him once or twice but without ill-feeling, though words had been high at the time, for Grisha felt a will in him that he could not fight. In consequence Grisha professed an exaggerated regard for John's good qualities, and after high words had died down would exclaim with tears in his eyes, "I don't like you, Vanya, but you're sincere, you're sincere. You're not one of these damned intellectuals!" Jenny, who had a passion for John which she did not try to conceal, would then exclaim shrilly, "Sincere, of course he's sincere. Isn't he a worker like ourselves? You ought to be ashamed to fall out with him, Grisha."

As for John, his observation of life was leading him to the conclusion that part of man's tragedy was his sincerity. The Ku Klux Klan were sincere when they murdered Pete; the shaven-polled officer was sincere when he beat Sasha with his revolver butt as he led him out to execution; the ex-solicitor sincerely believed he was liberating holy Russia with his band of cut-throat brigands. Sincerity seemed to make little difference, for the West Virginia miners sincerely shot down the Ku Klux, the tribunal in Chita sincerely shot shaven-poll and the ex-solicitor. Shurin sincerely believed in his own genius and honesty, Marusia in her theosophy. Grisha was sincere about everything, from the robbing of a village shop to the seduction of a village girl, exploits which he always related with sincere pride. Undoubtedly, decided John, there were many

ways of regarding sincerity, which in itself excused nothing. It seemed to be what was done that mattered, rather than how sincerely it was done. The trouble was how to discover what to do.

As the train made its slow way westwards the fact that they were approaching a land of doubt and tumult became ever more certain. From time to time their fellow travellers would break into fierce arguments about Soviet Russia. John could never understand from their talk exactly what was in dispute or where the disputers' real sympathies lay, but at least his curiosity was aroused. Sometimes Grisha, who always assumed the rôle of the disillusioned sceptic, would turn to him for confirmation of some remark. He generally introduced John into the discussions as a paragon of learning whose decision must be final.

"This young fellow," he would say, "knows a great deal and has read books in both American and Russian."

Once they found a peasant who refused to be overawed by this, a good-looking man with blue eyes and a short golden-brown beard, evidently a richer peasant, a Kulak.

"I, too, have read a book," he asserted dogmatically.

"On how to sell a bad horse for a good one?" suggested Grisha.

"No. It was a work of imagination, left in my house by a Moscow merchant. It consisted of many stories about the life of a great English police spy, whose name was Sherlock Gomes. This man knew everything, and if he had seen you he would have known at once you were an actor and a man whose boots were stolen from the village shop."

Grisha looked mournfully at his precious pink boots. "Then your Englishman would have been a fool, brother, for my boots are my own and known to be mine through half Siberia. Even if he was an Englishman he did not know everything."

"Yes, he did, everything."

A soldier who was listening put in a word. "Then he was not a man at all, but an angel of God, who looked for sin in men's hearts."

"No," reasserted the peasant, "he was a man," and brought forward many examples of weakness of flesh in Holmes which stamped him as undeniably mortal. These proofs accepted, the argument went back to the virtues of Communism. The Kulak disapproved. "Taxes are heavy and instead of paying in money so that you know just what they're going to take, you have to pay in kind, and nobody knows what the Commissar thinks your cow is worth."

Another soldier, a young fellow, snub-nosed and pock-marked, took up the defence of Communism. "Ah! you Kulaks, you're all alike, you will only be happy when you are all Americans and millionaires. And then you will cut one another's throat to see who is to be the richest millionaire."

Jenny sided with the Kulak. "The Bolsheviks are a godless crowd. Trying to make women the equal of men indeed! Why, I ask you, how is an honest girl to make a living when she is just the same as a man in every way? Oi, oi, oi!" Her hands were folded over her ample bosom and her body rocked in amiable disapproval. John was reminded of the performance to the partisans when all through the interval she had sat on a stool behind the scenes, rocking herself dolorously, crying "Oi, oi, oi!" and only pausing to ask with hardly concealed delight if John and Grisha thought there was going to be a "really terrible" fight.

The soldier immediately began to argue with her. "Now, mother" (she hated to be addressed as mother), "you don't mean that you really think women aren't as good as men. Why, half the evils in society are caused because women are oppressed by men."

"Oh! you know a lot!" she snorted. "Evils of society, indeed! You might be Lenin himself, mightn't you? Let me tell you that when the Soviet was running Vladivostok no one suffered worse than we poor women. Why, I myself was made a martyr. Talk about the cause of women, I've suffered for it, far more than all your short-haired, godless young Bolsheviks, that no man with a ha'porth of taste would ever waste five minutes on nor five kopecks either."

The soldier was interested. "You suffered for the cause of woman, mother? Tell us about that." There was just a slight note of incredulity behind his query which acted as a spur on Jenny.

"Yes, I've suffered. Six weeks I was in prison with only black bread and soup to eat, and all for trying to earn an honest living. Mr. Nesteroff came to see me one day, and I'm sure he's one of the nicest gentlemen in Vladivostok, and one of the most respected too. Why, he once had tea with the British Admiral! 'Now, Jenny,' he said to me, 'I want you to find me a really nice girl for a young friend of mine—an English officer. I know I can trust you, Jenny,' he says, and he could too, for it was me who found him the girl he had kept for three years, so I thought of a young friend of mine who was out of work and I went to her. 'Natasha, my darling,' I says to her, 'if you'll come with me tomorrow afternoon, I'll introduce you to such a fine young gentleman—an officer, too, and none of your penniless Russians either, my dear, but a real Englishman. You're a beautiful girl, my dear, and just what he wants. If you tell him you're a countess ruined by the Revolution and that you must come home to your old father who is starving before ten o'clock, lest he should discover you are leading a life of shame, why, Natasha,' I said, 'there's no reason why you shouldn't get a hundred roubles from him, all in real English pounds.' Now, would you believe it!

Natasha meets a nice young man in a café that very night and tells him all about her wonderful luck, for it was almost her first job, poor girl, and might have led to anything. But the very next morning I am arrested and Mr. Nesteroff also. That young man was nothing but a dirty policeman spying for the Bolsheviks. I saw him at the trial, the pig. A year they gave me, and Mr. Nesteroff got two, such a respectable man, one that had had tea with the English Admiral and whom everybody liked in Vladivostok. Now what do you think of your Bolsheviks after that, young man?"

"Why, nothing, mother, except that they saved the girl from a shameful thing."

"Saved her indeed! Oi, oi, oi! what a fool!" Jenny was quite pitiful. "Drove her on the streets for any low scamp to pick up, when I could have fixed her up in a really high-class thing."

The soldier smiled. "Well, that's one way of looking at it. Anyhow, you don't seem to have suffered much in prison. Perhaps the prison was better under the Bolsheviks?"

"Better indeed!" she snorted. "Not at all what I was accustomed to, let me tell you. Not the usual class of people there either, but full of real ladies who made it most uncomfortable for us poor women. Always washing, they were, and wouldn't have anything to do with the common folks. Oh, I can tell you, I'd a thousand times rather have been in prison in the old days when we were all friendly and comfortable. But it didn't last long, praise God!"

"No? What happened?" asked the soldier.

"Why, six weeks later the Allies overturned the cursed Bolsheviks and all of us poor victims of the Terror were released. I saw them bring in some of your Communist friends as we went out, and I'm glad to say I spat at them. One of our company nearly scratched the face off one, and

she was a lady all right, wife of a titular councillor, they said."

The train came to a stop here and they all dismounted with their kettles to get water for the evening tea. The sun was sinking in the forest-clad hills. Afar off one caught a glimpse of blue mountains, a glimpse of a solitude lit only by the vivid colours of the travelling sun, by the brilliance of the star-clad Siberian night, where only the tents of occasional nomads and the wild calling of bird and beast betrayed the stirring of life. John's heart was caught for a moment by its seeming isolation. He could not see the chain that led from beast and nomad to the busy life on the railroad, to the tales of Jenny, to fights between worker and capitalist, to Europe, to all the great cities of the world that lay behind the sunset, far beyond Chita, at the end of the Trans-Siberian.

Back in the train, in the semi-darkness of their jolting wooden truck, another argument rose between Grisha and the Kulak. Grisha had suddenly been taken by one of his tragic moods. "Ah, you Kulaks, you know nothing, you care for nothing, except your little farm, and so much in the bank after every harvest. But I am from the people. I have suffered. At least the Bolsheviks have cleared out the landlords and the capitalists and a poor man is able to breathe and call his soul his own. You look at me and you think, 'He's only a fool of a strolling actor with pink boots. What can he know?' I know everything, I tell you, because I have suffered everything. Hunger, cold, heat, prison. I have gone starving to look for work on a farm and been told to go to hell by men like you with a good dinner in their bellies. Perhaps if I hadn't looked quite so down and out, if I hadn't been quite so ragged and hungry, you might have let me break my back in your fields for a few days. But no, he looks like a beast, like a half-starved cur. A kick and 'go to hell' is good enough for him!"

John was sitting beside Grisha and he felt that thin man, for it was already too dark to see, trembling with violent emotion. His heart went out to him and he joined in the argument till together they had reduced the peasant to silence.

The young soldier pushed to the heavy door, shutting out the thin strip of blue night, and they fell asleep heavily, their poor bones shaken by the hard boards of the jolting truck, but drowsed by the very motion. In the middle of the night John awoke, to find Grisha sitting up beside him. The train had come to a halt at some wayside station and they could hear the loud whistle of locomotives, and a screaming and grinding on the steel rails, as their engine was changed. Grisha turned to John.

"Vanya, my lad," he said, "you were wrong to take my side against that fat pig tonight."

"Why?" John asked.

"Because maybe I was wrong. You don't know. I've noticed that you're rather inclined to be carried away by emotion, and I warn you it isn't good for you, Vanya. Just because I let fly at the svorloch you got the idea that perhaps I wasn't the drunken, good-for-nothing vagabond that I am. You're getting a Russian soul, my lad, and I am warning you in time to drop it. Every drunken idiot in this God-forsaken country tries to make capital out of his sufferings. Don't you be taken in by it, my boy. It's a beggars' trick and we are a nation of beggars."

"Well," said John, "where's the harm in recognizing the good in a man when it does come out? If you have real feeling in you somewhere, why not accept it when it does come to the top?"

"Vanya, I'm afraid you're a fool. Where's your belt, little Vanya, the belt you keep your money in, all those beautiful American dollars, two hundred and thirty of them?"

John started and felt hastily for the belt, which he had taken off at the beginning of the argument with the peasant, thinking he was safe to do so as only Grisha was sitting near.

The belt was still there beside him, but it was empty of dollars. With a sigh Grisha pressed a bundle of paper into his hands, the missing notes.

"You see, you are a fool. While you were so hotly taking my part I was feeling your belt. It has always interested me, that belt, and the fact that you never let it leave you, even when you slept."

"You took my money? What for, seeing you're giving it back to me?"

"Because I am too lazy to steal it, my dear. Mind you, you don't deserve to get it back, since you were fool enough to trust me. It wasn't right of you, Vanya, to break our friendship in such a cruel way, and I was in two minds to give it back to you or not."

"What do you mean, break our friendship?"

"Well, it is broken now. How can I ever travel with you again knowing that you have such a little fortune on your waist? It would drive me mad, Vanya. No, tomorrow night when we reach Chita you must leave us. It's hard enough to forgive you now for taking that belt off when you knew I was sitting there beside you."

If John could have seen Grisha's face he would have been surprised by the angry despair that almost brought tears to the pale blue eyes. To have had such a sum in his grasp and to have been forced to return it! Grisha could hardly contain the agonizing humiliation he suffered in that moment.

"I can never forgive you for it, Vanya. We must part at the first opportunity. If it weren't that I had paid the fare to Chita for Jenny and myself I would get out here."

John was really hurt at this. He considered for a mo-

ment if it were any use to offer some of the money to Grisha, but decided it would be no use. Indeed the latter seemed to anticipate his thought.

"You know," he said, "money is a real curse to me. Having it sends me to prison, even quicker than the lack of it. Why, if you gave me fifty dollars now, I'd be off this train and up to God knows what devilment. You couldn't have done a worse thing, Vanya, than give me a chance to get hold of all that money. I never dreamed you had more than a few dollars."

"Well," John said at last, "if you are really serious about it I suppose I had better leave you at Chita. But you know I shall be sorry, Grisha. I have learned a lot from you and Jenny."

"From us?" Grisha laughed bitterly. "If I thought that was true I should have something to be ashamed of, for let me tell you straight, my boy, I don't like the way you've been this last week or two. You've been moony, looking at sunsets and the like of that. Moreover you've been getting big ideas about people. It's a fault of yours, to start off making big ideas of people. It seems as though you must have a hero."

"I hadn't noticed it," John confessed. "In what way?"

"Well, take this Sasha who was shot at Ephimovka. You've talked about him for hours ever since, as though he were a holy martyr, till Jenny's actually complained to me in private that she thought you must be getting queer in the head. I expect if you really could hear the truth about him, he beat his mother and robbed a whore. I daresay you did the same thing back in America with other people." (John thought of Pete.) "I don't know about that, but when it comes to taking sides with a God-forsaken scoundrel like myself against that honest, respectable, hard-working peasant, snoring his guts out in the

corner over there, it's time I spoke to you about it. In fact if you go on that way you won't be fit to have any money."

At this point the engine hit the front of their train, sending a clanging and rattling from end to end till it reached their own truck, banging it noisily into the next, which was the guard's and last, sending the jarring echoes rolling far off into the dark night. After that there was no peace till their train was shunted and the new locomotive attached. But by that time Grisha was fast asleep, snoring as heartily as the rich peasant and the young soldier.

As the train moved off John heard Jenny move in her corner. She muttered something of which he could only catch, "Two hundred and thirty dollars," then after a moment's silence he heard her sigh heavily, "Oi, oi, oi! what fools men are! Temptation, indeed, I'll give him temptation!"

CHAPTER VIII

At Chita they finally agreed to part. John argued with Grisha, though vainly, for Grisha was steeled even against the tearful pleadings of Jenny, to whom the thought that not only John but two hundred and thirty dollars were leaving them, was well-nigh unbearable.

"No," he repeated, "I won't have it, Vanya. You and your damned money must get away from me. I would never have taken you on if I had thought for a moment you were so rich. I thought you might have fifty dollars,—but two hundred and thirty!"

And so it was decided. Jenny embraced him, called him her little dove, her little cucumber, and implored him not to be rash with his money, now that he was going out of her care. Grisha smiled his usual smile of mingled good humour and weary disgust. "Proschaitye, Vanya. Good-

bye. Whatever you do, don't marry a Jewess, and don't say you hope to see us again, because you won't."

In fact he did not. They passed out of his life as completely as many scores of other people, companions on the route, were destined to do. After a day or two he did not even regret them. Grisha, he reflected, was after all a rather mean and dirty vagabond, and Jenny a greedy old Jewish bawd. If any one had asked him for his opinion upon his life with the wandering pair he would have replied that it was not wasted, though why he could not tell. Years after he came to the conclusion that it was because in those two was embodied every human weakness, and that if at times he came near to loving them, it was for that reason and no other. Grisha and Jenny had no illusions about themselves, and what they were they never tried to conceal, not because they were proud of it, but because they did not consider themselves at all unusual. John thought that maybe they were fairly justified in this belief.

He took the westward train, to Omsk, where he hoped to find Yasha, for July was already coming to its close and his rendezvous was for the first week in August. The train stopped at Baikal, not for a few minutes only, but for two whole hours. John bathed in the clear blue water, looked admiringly at the great mountains and regretted that he could not stay there with Yasha and Michael to fish and hear stories of that great Siberian life he was so fast leaving behind. He had already heard enough in his passage over mountain and plain, through great forests and along mighty rivers, to fill him with an ardent desire for more. The wild life of the gold-fields, for example, about which Grisha and Jenny had so many stories, or hunting in those northern solitudes so vast that one felt rather than pictured them.

In time the train arrived at Omsk and he sought out

Yasha. At the offices of the District Committee of the Party he found him, and Yasha, who was just about to go to a meeting, gave him a key and sent him off to his room. John went in, and tired out from the ten days' rattling on the boards of a cattle-truck, fell on to the bed and into a deep and dreamless sleep.

When Yasha woke him it was already dark, perhaps ten or eleven at night. John sat up on the bed, while his friend from an armchair opposite looked curiously at him.

"You are older," Yasha said at last.

John stretched and yawned. "Sixteen very soon," he informed him. "However, what does that mean? If I had stayed in America, rubbing my pants through on a school bench, I would still have been ten."

"I hardly had a chance to see you, in Vladivostok. What have you been doing since, that makes you look like a peasant boy from the Amur forests?"

Indeed John was burned by the sun to the colour of stained wood. His black unruly hair was more wild and tangled than ever, while his chest, seen through the ragged open blouse, was as deep burned as his face and neck. The bare feet that swung over the bedside were browned also. He looked, and was, a wandering peasant boy, one of the homeless thousands who wander across the vastness of Russia, coming from nowhere, going nowhere, living in bands upon the outskirts of towns, or along the railroads, wandering from sheer inability to stay fixed, living a strange, communal life of their own, half outcasts.

John told him about his life with Grisha and Jenny, while Yasha listened quietly, smoking cigarette after cigarette, here and there asking a question, especially when John told of the partisan raid at Ephimovka. Halfway through he made tea and provided some bread and ham. It was past midnight by the time John had finished his story, but they did not stop talking.

"You have seen something of Russian life," Yasha told him.

"Seems to me I've seen something of everybody's life," John answered, "whether it's Russian, or German, or African, or whatever you like to call it, and I want to see more. I want to see everything, to know every kind of people."

Yasha smiled. "That's not bad for a beginning. At least you have started young. And why this thirst for knowledge?"

"I don't know. But it does feel like a kind of thirst. I feel I must wear my feet out seeing this world, finding out why people do what they do, why they are what they are."

"Well, why do they? Why are they? Haven't you discovered anything on your travels? Even I have not seen so much as you, though I have travelled a little myself."

"I don't know," John confessed, swinging his legs on to the bed again, pushing his head into the mountainous white pillow. "For example, Yasha, why is Pete dead, and why did they murder Sasha? They were real men, those two, yet they were killed by other men who after all were very like Pete and Sasha, up to a point."

Yasha shrugged his shoulders. "That's life, Vanya. Up to a point. You have it all in those words. Life doesn't stand still any more than you have been standing still since the day you were born. When it gets to that certain point and has to pass beyond, there is trouble. The best people get killed, or die in the struggle, but life goes on. Before this year is out the Far-Eastern Republic will be a Communist Republic and Vladivostok will be part of it. In time America will also be a Socialist Republic. That's how life answers the people who murdered Sasha and Pete."

"Is that why you were in Vladivostok, why you were in Tientsin? Were you working for a revolution?"

"Well, I was working for the Party. But it's late now. We can talk about that another time."

They went to bed. When John woke the next morning Yasha had already gone and he did not see him again until very late the following night. Yasha's life was wrapped in what he always referred to as "The Party," and though John learned that he had a wife in Moscow, a pretty girl from her photograph, her existence did not seem to trouble him greatly. Whenever John referred to her, Yasha would pass the matter lightly off, with some such remark as "Well, I suppose she has another husband by now."

John began to have a desire to know more about "The Party," but Yasha told him it was useless. He would not be able to understand it. "You have not yet been near enough to its life, Vanya. The Party was born out of struggle, out of the very life of the workers. You have only passed over the surface in your wanderings. Wait till you know what life is before you trouble your head about the Party. Wait till you have worked in the factory for a few years or starved on the streets in London or New York. Then the Party will mean something to you all right, as it does to me, as it does to all the working people in this country."

Two or three days passed by and John began to feel impatient to move. As he wandered through the wide streets of Omsk he often passed men who wore wide-skirted velvet coats caught round with a sash, who had embroidered skull-caps or white conical helmets of felt on their shaven skulls, and they filled him with a vague feeling of curiosity that here he was on the fringe of another life to be penetrated at all costs. Their broad, yellow-brown faces, bloodshot brown eyes, sparse black beards and moustaches, their heavy horsemen's gait, were new to him. When he described them to Yasha he was told they were Kirghiz,

the nomads of the Steppe. Once or twice John saw magnificent bearded men in vivid robes of striped silk, their round skull-caps embroidered in bright colours. These, he was told, were Usbegs from the great cities of Turkestan.

The names of these cities, singing in his head—Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent and Merv—fascinated him. Like Tientsin, like the Chinese villages along the Amur, they hinted at a different life, at something very old and very strange. Yasha laughed at him a little when he tried to express himself.

"Romantic," he would say. "There is no difference, Vanya, my dear, save on the surface. There are poets, or rather, there were poets, in Russia who have written wonderful lines about the mysterious East. More fools they! That is the one way to miss all the real interest."

"Isn't it mysterious?" John asked. "That's how they strike me, all those men in their vivid clothes, with their far-away faces. Mysterious, but very much alive. As though they knew a thing or two we didn't, a thing or two that *I'd* like to know, for example."

"A thing or two we knew and have forgotten," Yasha assured him. "And maybe nothing much lost either. They lived as Russians lived three hundred years ago and already they also are beginning to forget. Speak to them, get to know them, they are no different from you or me, save that life is not so full for them. They fill their minds with superstition—that's all the gap there is between us, and when you have got through it, what you will find is something very like yourself."

"Maybe," admitted John. "But all the same I would like to cross the gap."

"Nothing easier. Come with me on my holiday and you will sea the East—without anything to hide what it really is. In a caravan you will meet every kind of man—and you will find them all—just men."

"I will come. What shall I need?"

"A horse, warm blankets and a sheepskin. The frosty nights will have come before we reach Vierni. You have money and we can buy all you need for less than forty dollars."

"Very well, I am coming."

They were in Yasha's room, John on the bed, his friend sitting at the table. Yasha said nothing for a while and then suddenly turned to him. "You know, you're a pretty cool customer, Vanya. Why are you coming with me? What are you going to do when your money's finished, what do you intend to make of life? There's a saying in this country, 'He who does not work neither shall he eat.' We live up to it, and six months ago it wasn't so easy to eat even if you did work."

John did not answer. Yasha went on.

"All right. But life is no joke, especially it's no joke here. All the same I would like to know what you are up to."

John answered him. "You say it's no joke, you say it, but I don't know. That's all. I just want to know, for myself, by myself. Work? Why should I? That's what I want to know, and if I can't find a good reason, well, there's ways of living without working, if not here, in other countries. People worked in America. Yes, they all worked like hell, and what for? Some to get rich, others to keep rich, most people just to keep alive, and when they'd worked enough for that they'd finished. I can tell you I don't think much of it. At best it's a dirty life they work for. I want to know why I should do the same, and if there isn't another way than that one."

Yasha laughed. "Stop here and you'll find some very good reasons for working, and the first will be to live, and the second to live, and the third to live. What's more, you'll find out why we want to live here. At least you

might. But I have a notion you may come to grief on the way—you're a queer lad."

John got to know a great deal about Yasha during those long summer evenings, when they sometimes talked till dawn. He was not very expansive, and did not talk much about himself, but from a hint here, a story there, John gathered that he had been a railway worker at Harbin in Manchuria during the revolution. He had been a Communist since 1916 and had found plenty of work to do when first the Allied Missions, then Kolchak, had gripped the Trans-Siberian. When Kolchak was smashed he had left Harbin to work in China for the Party. Michael, too, it appeared, had joined the Party with him and had gone to work in Tientsin at the Refrigerator. Yasha told some good stories of his adventures there among the White refugees. He had lived with three of them in Tientsin, passing himself off as an ex-officer. Then when Siberia had been finally cleaned and relations with China re-established, he had gone to Pekin to work in the Soviet Legation. One day in walked one of his former officer companions. "What! you here!" the officer had gasped. Yasha was ready for the situation. "Shh!" he whispered, lifting one finger warningly and winking one quizzical grey eye. The officer, so firm was his faith in him, was silent at once, thinking that Yasha had taken on the courageous work of a spy among the Reds.

But the truth had come out in the end, after he had left his work in the Legation. That was one reason why certain people had waited for him on a certain day on a wharf at Tientsin, hoping to drop him in the harbour. They had been disappointed, as John knew very well.

Yasha was consumptive. He had worked for three years without a holiday all over the Far East, suffering hunger, cold, excessive heat, malaria, living in disguise in native huts, sleeping out for nights on end, wearing himself to a

shadow. The doctor had told him to go among the Kirghiz and drink kummis for two months, and he had chosen this way to do so.

John began to feel, when he knew all this, that Yasha at least could claim to have reason to live. Indeed, he had felt from the first day three years ago in Tientsin that Yasha and Michael were two people who were different, as Pete had been different. Now he was beginning to see, very slowly, why they were different. But he had a long way to go yet. He had to find out why they had become so, he had to discover how he might himself become so, if he could, and he was not yet sure that it was possible.

In fact John could feel himself changing. Grisha had been right. After that night in the woods, when he had heard the nightingale throb brokenly over the battlefield, he had not been the same. Strange longings, surly moods, took possession of him. Scraps of verse and music floated through his head and he would strum for hours together on his guitar, aimlessly, tunelessly, till some sudden note set his heart singing.

Women he hated, or despised, since that night he had seen Murphy's girl with Shurin. Yet all the same he watched them, noting the beauty of their eyes and hair, the turn of a brown leg or the roundness of an arm. When he caught himself doing this, he cursed, foully and fluently, with the poetry of an American slum boy and a vocabulary in two languages.

After a fortnight in Omsk he could rest no more, and pestered Yasha with a request to be gone.

So at last they went to the market and he bought a horse, a brown Kirghiz pony, shaggy and short-headed, two years old and wild as a desert gazelle, shying at everything in the street and straining at the rein. The Kirghiz who sold him said he was for the first time in the town.

The next day they were to go.

Part Three

ASIA

CHAPTER I

THE bazaar, whence the caravan set out, was a jumble of wooden huts, of camels lurching through the thronging folk, guttural Kirghiz perched upon their backs, merrily chaffing and abusing those below them from their secure height. There was a little wooden mosque with six feet of minaret stuck on askew to support the mullah and a golden crescent. Not far away stood a red-brick church, green-cupolaed, six-limbed orthodox crosses grotesquely standing sentinel at every corner of the rambling building.

The crowd about their caravan was so dense that they had difficulty in pushing their horses through as far as the groaning camels which stood harnessed to the wooden carts, or knelt on the ground the while tents and merchandise were finally secured upon their patient backs.

Yasha rode his horse up to a place where the din seemed to be dominated into some seeming of order by a black-coated, bulky Cossack, his round fur cap pushed back from a perspiring brow while he gave orders rapidly as machine gun fire in fluent Kirghiz.

The Cossack, a brick-red, curly-headed man of middle age, very broad and stout, turned to John and Yasha, his smile of welcome disclosing white teeth between merry red lips.

"Good day, my friend. You see we are ready, if only I can get these whoresons to move their lazy guts. Hi! you sons of Shaitan—!" The rest was lost to John in a flow of Eastern imprecation.

At last the straining Kirghiz tugged the complaining camels to their feet. The creaking line of carts was set in motion, the last of the nomads had mounted his pony, cursed his dog, and called a good-humoured farewell to his friends and enemies.

John noticed broad-cheeked women in white linen headgear perched upon the camels, or among the merchandise in the low springless carts. Sheep and one or two goats were driven along by sturdy, ragged herdsmen, who trudged barefoot, heavy staves in their hands. He decided that their pilgrimage was going to be slow, though picturesque.

The Cossack had come to Yasha's side, and they were riding together. John joined them and the quick brown eyes of their guide were turned upon him.

"This is your American, Yakov Grigorich?" queried the Cossack.

"My American—or, rather, he is an international, for he has been everywhere and knows everything," said Yasha, laughing. "Ivan Ivanich, there is the starosta of our caravan—Ilya Fedorich Kireiev, a Ural Cossack and a great scoundrel."

The Cossack laughed, a rather low and husky laugh, almost a chuckle coming from so large a man.

"Ai, ai! Ivan Ivanich, take no notice of him. What is he himself but a Bolshevist and an atheist—worse than these heathen Kazaks." And he lifted his short whip to point to the Kirghiz.

Yasha turned to John. "Kireiev is so religious that his father turned him out of doors when he was eighteen and never spoke to him again. Whenever he's drunk he prays to God, but he forgets whether he is a Christian or a Mussulman, and cries out, 'Lord God, be merciful to me, I pray thee Allah, the compassionate, the all-knowing.' The most religious thing he ever did was to beat an abbot with his

knout until he was half dead, because he thought the Holy Church had cheated him over a horse which he sold to a monastery at Orenburg."

"Don't listen to him, Ivan Ivanich. It is true I have lived a wild and infidel life with these Kirghiz dogs, until I might indeed have forgotten whether I am a child of the Orthodox God or a true-believing Mussulman, but I am a religious man at bottom, not one of your Bolsheviks. Why, Yasha here has made his Lenin into God and the Tsar. I am content to have no Tsar and keep my old God." Once more the Cossack laughed his little husky laugh, like a child's.

A fourth horseman joined them at this point. "Ai! keep your old God, Ilyusha. He's been an easy father to you. Have you seen Ali Hodja? The old devil's slipped out of sight while we were loading his beasts and his bay mare is lame. He must have known, but I could not find him to tell him to leave her behind."

The Cossack chuckled. "And she is still in the caravan. Andrusha, my son, thou art a fool, an infant, beside the guile of that son of Shaitan, Ali Hodja. He has brought his lame mare against all rules that he may sell her at the first aul we reach. She will fetch a better price than in the town. Away with you and stir him out. Threaten to turn the mare adrift unless he takes her back."

The horseman turned and rode away. John had noticed with interest his oval face, rather long nose and wide determined mouth. But what struck him most were the stranger's eyes, brown, eager and sensitive, roaming from one to another of their little company in the minute or two he was there. Yasha turned inquiringly to Kireiev. "Is that your partner, Ilya Fedorich, the young bourgeois you mentioned to me?"

The Cossack nodded. "Yes, that's Andrei Sergeivich, our Andrusha. I love him like a son. Ah! you Bolsheviks,

you laugh at an old merchant like me, call me a rogue because I grow rich out of your N.E.P., but I'm not the heartless villain you pretend. I tell you I will do anything for that man. Yet there was a time once when I sought him for a day and a night with my rifle, mad to kill him. But in fact I was mad. So was he. Ai! we have suffered together, we two, and I love him. Nevertheless what I have been through was heaven compared to that man's hell. I would shoot myself here rather than live through some of the days he's seen. He's a man. You'll see, in five minutes he'll have that old swine out of his cart and off back with his mare."

Indeed, from behind they could hear already loud protestations, indignant denials, sturdy argument that was suddenly dominated by a firm rich voice which spoke shortly, with almost savage emphasis. The protest died suddenly, and presently an old man with a wrinkled yellow face, sparsely bearded, rode by them, leading a lame bay mare by a rope halter.

"Shame on you, Ali Hodja Bai," Kireiev called in Russian. "Shame on you to bring that lame beast with the caravan!"

"Allah is my witness, my dear soul, it was without my knowledge. My boy brought her, may God requite him for it! And I knew nought. Andrei Sergeivich is too hard upon me."

"Well, send her back and all will be peace."

"Indeed I seek my boy now and he shall return to the bazaar to sell her there. He's lazing behind, where the maidens ride, seeking shame for my grey head. Allah give me strength to chastise him."

"Begone and beat him soundly, and may he give it back to thee with interest, for thou art an old rogue, Ali Bai, though I love thee for it."

The old man grinned. "Ah, Dilkim, you are too cunning for us poor Cossacks. Surely you will one day meet your match and it will be Shaitan himself," whereat he ambled off, the mare limping with him.

The old man, Kireiev explained, was a rich Kirghiz from Auli Ata, an old friend of his, in whose tent they would seek hospitality at the end of each day's march.

As they rode on John was more and more impressed by their guide. The old Cossack seemed to know every inch of Kirghiz territory, every tribe and clan, every scandal and family relationship of the three million Kazak people. Kireiev explained with the candour of a child the influence he had gained over the nomads. "Dilki," "the fox," they called him. He claimed they respected him for his straightness and sincerity, but as he told with pride of his trips to Moscow and a thousand roubles flung away on gipsies in one night's revelling, John suspected that perhaps he was respected rather for his adroitness in striking a bargain than for any remarkable honesty in trading. It had not taken him many years of life to discover that men are apt to respect those most who rob them best.

CHAPTER II

THEY marched for six days in fair weather, but the dawn of the seventh day's march was dull and cold. The women shrank down upon the backs of the ungainly camels, as though seeking protection in their huge bulk from the bitter wind. The tattered herdsmen pulled their rags more closely across their sun-burned chests and strode on uncomplainingly beside the flocks. The horsemen, the little group of Europeans and the richer Kirghiz, cursed at the slowness of the long march, galloped in swift tangents to warm themselves by racing, while one and all

prayed for the evening, for the comfort of the thick felt tents and the glow of the cooking fires.

As the day wore on the wind rose and blew more bitterly, a thin drizzle fell from the grey sky, then ceased, but finally a burst of violent thunder brought with it blinding rain, and the caravan gave up the struggle. They strove in the icy gale to put up the tents, whipping together the round framework of osier with leather thongs, with difficulty tying down in the wind the heavy felts upon the frame. It was done at last, but there was still no comfort, for the beasts must be attended to, fuel gathered for the fire, sheep slaughtered in the blinding rain which was striking them now with its full fury, and it was long before the wayfaring tasks of the caravan were all duly performed. The end came, however, and the wanderers were seated in their tents, drying their dripping clothes by the fires about which the women silently busied themselves with the cooking.

John shivered, frozen to the bone. The great Cossack laughed at him, and at Yasha who was trying to slip off his shirt, while Ali Hodja, unperturbed and dignified as ever, kept a watchful eye upon the women round the fire. Andrei Sergeivich smiled too, but not with sympathy.

"The Steppe is a harsh mother," he said.

"Damn the Steppe," answered John, emphatically. "Why did I leave America?" Yasha was laughing. "This is a kill-or-cure holiday, eh, Vanya?"

They made tea, thin stuff from the hard black bricks the nomads carry with them on a journey, unsweetened and sharp-flavoured by sour mare's milk, kummis, as the nomads call it.

Ali Hodja sighed as he drank, "Ai, soon the season for kummis will be gone, and tea unflavoured will be our lot."

"You are lucky," Andrei Sergeivich assured him. "Most of the nomads have not even tea."

"True," the old man sighed. "The years have left us lean."

And for a long time he bemoaned the fate of his people, driven into rebellion by the Tsar, overrun by a bloody horde of Cossacks, reduced to starvation by the revolution, and now at last slowly groping back to life.

"You are a hard race," Yasha said to him.

The old man's yellow bloodshot eyes lit up. "Verily a hard race and a bold one. Our forefathers were littered by a she-wolf in the Altai mountains, our blood has run in the veins of great conquerors, of Chingiz Khan and Timur. We shall not die yet."

Night after night John learned much history while sitting around the tent fires, and from Ali Hodja's lips he drained up the life of this great people. He heard for the first time the names of men who had changed the face of the world, Chingiz, Timur, Akbar and their like, and learned with surprise that these great warriors were just such men as Ali Hodja, born in the black tents or mud huts of the Steppe, weaned on the milk of mares—horsemen and wanderers.

The legends which Ali Hodja told them, Andrei Sergeivich refashioned into history, and John heard of wars as ruthless and terrible as that he had just lived through, of great cities sacked, of whole peoples massacred, kings unthroned, great princes betrayed, and for the first time he realized the tragic past of mankind.

As they fell asleep beside the glowing embers, while the hail and rain beat furiously down outside, he began to see in some kind of perspective the death of Pete, the shooting of Sasha.

"Is it true," he asked one night, "that when there has been revolution everywhere, there will be no more war?"

Ali Hodja looked incredulous. "It is the dream of a

fool, Yan, my son. Man is born to die, and did he not kill himself he would suffer just the same, dying of evil disease, of storm, or flood, or famine."

Andrei Sergeivich laughed. "When every nation is a Soviet Republic then one republic will still fight another in the name of some foolish idea. There have been revolutions before, men have preached peace and equality before, but that has not stopped the murder of millions in the last eight years."

Yasha smiled. "Take no notice, Vanya. They're a pair of ravens. In five years' time Ali Hodja's people will be driving tractors over the Steppe. In seven years, where we now ride on camels and horseback, there will be a railway, from Omsk to Tashkent."

The cold weather and the storm lasted for nearly two weeks, and then September came in a burst of warm sunshine. John was hardened now to the saddle. In the daytime, half naked, he would wrestle Cumberland-fashion with the Kirghiz youths, and give as many throws as he took. He learned something of their Turkish speech, picked up all the law of the tribes and clans, of the three great Hordes of Kazak people, so that Yasha began to tease him that he was become half a Kirghiz.

He did not mind the gibe. They seemed to him a merry, kindly race, though Ilya Fedorich sneered at them as "camels." The old Cossack did not dislike the nomads, but he felt towards them a kind of friendly contempt, such as was due to a people out of whom he had succeeded in making a comfortable living, and whom he habitually beat in a battle of wits.

In fact, the Kirghiz are a gross and stolid people, kindly, but given to fits of sullen rage that know no bounds, black and violent as the desert storms. They are superstitious, but not religious, their only real faith a vague pantheism.

Their lives are centred about their flocks, their horses, and their herds, and their minds are the minds of herdsmen. But John was young, and the rough horse-play of the young men pleased him, as did their frank and open manners. Cunning they reserved for the bazaar, or for driving a bargain over a maid's dowry.

Between the plains of the Irtish and the mountains of Semirechiye they came upon a great collection of tents, like a cluster of black beehives. The daughter of a khan of one of the greatest clans of the Little Horde was about to be married. It was the first wedding to be celebrated by a feast and sports for many years and the tribesmen were preparing to make the most of it.

Ali Hodja was always welcome in the tents of his countrymen, and the father of the bride insisted that they should stay for the festivities.

"My soul," he exclaimed to Ali Hodja, when they were seated in his tent, "I am giving a lordly prize of ten fleet mares and a black stallion in the races which are to be held. Twenty she-camels are to be striven for in other contests, and my beloved pacer, my darling Sultan Achmet, I am giving to the victor in the baiga."

The baiga, Yasha explained to John, was a mounted mêlée for the body of the sheep, a contest demanding skill and hardihood from the riders. It was played by all the Kirghiz, the Kara-Kirghiz, the Turkomans, by the Turkish peoples from the Ural mountains to Kashgar in China, wherever a nomad Turk mounted his horse.

Their host, Qunat Bai, was still enlarging on the splendours of his daughter's wedding.

"One hundred goats, ten young horses and three hundred sheep are being slaughtered for the feasting. My guests shall eat till they are carried helpless away on the backs of their camels. In the ages to come men shall sing songs of the wedding of Qunat Bai's daughter."

The two old men sat side by side, boasting of their wealth and herds, of the splendours of their hospitality and the fame of their families.

Yasha sighed. "You would not think, Vanya, that a few months ago half this nation were starving. Yet it is so. Even now tea is a luxury for them and thousands of nomads have not eaten wheaten bread for years."

Ilya Fedorich dabbed his brick-red brow with a handkerchief. "Yes, and if you Bolsheviks stay, they won't eat it again, and there will be no more wedding feasts, eh, Yasha?"

Yasha sighed. "No. No more feasting and fewer wives."

"Ah, you will take away all the joy of our lives if we suffer you long enough."

"Oh no, Ilyusha; we wouldn't do that. We shall only stop you buying wives, whether you are Christian or Muslim. But have as many as you are strong enough for, if you can get them honestly."

In the morning the sports began. The broad-cheeked, yellow-brown horsemen, their legs bowed with constant use of the saddle, sparse-bearded, broad and sturdy, stood about in laughing, excited groups, waiting for the first, the most thrilling event, the chase of the bride.

She came out from her tent, where the women had been guarding her, bright in her wonderful costume of red and white, with the lofty head-dress. They cheered and shouted as she appeared, short, youthful, with a strong and graceful carriage, the frank and honest face of the Kirghiz maidens. With much crying of ribald pleasantries, confusion and jostling, they made way for her father's famous black stallion, which he rode through the press himself, a broad-chested, wild young brute, flashing his hooves as he danced around, half in fear, half in pride.

The old Kirghiz leapt lightly from the saddle, the girl as lightly leapt up in his place, there was a whirl of hooves.

and her bright sarafan was a coloured flash across the Steppe on the edge of the camp.

With a cry the young men sped after her, and behind them the whole throng of eager horsemen, intent on the fun, John among them. The girl rode her wild stallion magnificently, wheeling and twisting as easily as a hare, darting now straight out over the broad Steppe, the chase lengthening out behind.

Half a dozen of them drew up with her and she shrewdly beat them off with her heavy whip, till he, the chosen one, the bridegroom, rode in with a shout under her arm and gripped her about the waist, their two horses jostling together in a wild gallop.

For two days their caravan rested, to enjoy the sports, to feast to their hearts' content, and to seek repose from the journey. At the end of the second day John was acclaimed a Djiguit by Ali Hodja and his companions, a tried horseman, a warrior. There was more of compliment than solid reality in the title, for cunning though he had become on horseback, he could not yet match the mettle of the nomads. Still, Djiguit he remained, and was content.

They were on their way again before the wedding had been consummated, and the real feasting begun. Had they stayed, Ali Hodja assured them, they would have needed a week to recover.

"Camels," said Ilya Fedorich, in his half apologetic, half disgusted tone, to Yasha and John.

"Men," said Andrei Sergeivich, "the sons of kings. Children of the Steppe."

CHAPTER III

So their even, monotonous journey continued. Now that the fair autumn weather had settled, clear and warm during the day, the air sparkling like wine, cold and frosty

at night, the details of their long progress varied hardly at all.

Each evening the caravan came to rest, horses and camels were turned loose or hobbled, guards were set over the flocks, tents raised by the women and the cooking fires lit. Soon, the great iron pots were hanging over them from the tripods and they were all sitting in Ali Hodja's tent, talking and smoking, while his wife and daughter prepared the evening meal. The old grey-beard, with his shrewd, wrinkled, yellow face and shaven head, surveyed them from his bed, whereon he sat cross-legged, drinking a bowl of sharp-flavoured kummis, the milk of mares. His two sons stood at the door of the tent, tall youths whose broad sunburned chests showed through their open cotton shirts. They did not speak in their father's presence, and from time to time disappeared on mysterious errands, for they followed little of the conversation, knowing only a few words of Russian. The women whispered a little to themselves, but they too were practically silent in the presence of the patriarch and his guests.

Not all their talk around the camp fires was of the past, or of the wayfaring life of the Kirghiz Kazaks. Stirring things were still happening in the mountains, and though the Kirghiz as a whole had little interest in the fighting, from time to time some name would occur in their talk, Madamin Bek or some other of the Basmachi leaders, and a tale would be told of the battles that had been raging now for five years in the marches of Turkestan.

"Who are the Basmachi?" John asked.

Ali Hodja was silent, unwilling for once to explain. Andrei Sergeivich looked at Yasha and smiled grimly. Evidently it was for him to explain. As for Yasha, he looked sideways at Ali Hodja and then winked at John.

"*He* knows best, but I will tell you. Most of them are ex-convicts, bandits and murderers, some of them are fanatics, and all of them are enemies of the Soviet power.

For three years after the Revolution they were supplied with rifles and machine guns by the English Consul in Kashgar and carried on a guerilla war against us. Last summer Enver Pasha, the Turk, tried to rally them under his banner to found a Muhammadan Turkish Empire in Central Asia. He failed and was killed in battle. One by one they have been defeated and killed, but first they did terrible damage, laid waste all Ferghana, made a desert of a fertile province."

"And now they are finished with?"

"Not quite. Some still linger on. In the mountains of Ferghana, near Samarkand, in Khiva, there are still a few left. Isn't that so, Ali Hodja?"

The old man was not comfortable, but he would not show it.

"Yes, I have heard that there are men in the mountains who are still fighting for the faith of their fathers."

Yasha laughed. "And you are a believer in the Shariat, Ali Hodja? Speak truly, do you not believe first in your flocks and horses?"

"Aye, and the Shariat protects them. But you, by God, would take them from me."

"So? Yet even Ilya Fedorich prefers us to the rule of the Basmachi. Isn't that true, Ilyusha?"

The Cossack, who had been listening quietly, nodded.

"Yes. They are against the Christians, they are fanatics. Moreover, they're in league with the English and the landlords, God preserve us!"

Andrei Sergeivich spoke for the first time. "Ali Hodja is a man of peace, but the Basmachi are his own people, they are Asia fighting against Europe."

"The past fighting the future."

"Maybe. But a noble past, and who can foresee the future?"

"The future is not a thing we know. It is something we are building," Yasha argued.

"The other night you said that in five years the Kirghiz would be driving tractors over the steppe. That is your future. It is no future for Ali Hodja, for he knows in his heart that you will see that he never gets a tractor; so in his heart, too, he feels for the Basmachi, who are fighting for the horses which have been the life of his people ever since the she-wolf first suckled them."

"That's true, Andrusha," the old man cried. "I am a Kazak, a wanderer. I love my horses. Without them I would only be an iron machine."

John thought of the gaily-coloured herds of horses roaming wild across the steppe, roan, black, bay and dapple, and then in their places he saw the steel tractors coming, the motor trucks, the railroads, the great concrete barrages across the rivers. Everywhere in this country there was the fight between old and new.

"Why argue?" Andrusha said. "If the new must come, it will come. If we cannot live with it, we shall die without it, you, Ali Hodja, and I."

"I shall not die," said Ilya Fedorich, the Cossack, and his hoarse voice was proud with confidence in his great strength.

"No," said Yasha, "perhaps not."

Andrusha spoke again, and his voice was dry and emotionless. "Not yet, Communist, but in the end you will kill him."

Ilya Fedorich laughed, a hoarse, deep little chuckle. He believed in himself as intensely as Andrusha disbelieved in himself. The one spoke always of life, of wealth to be wrenched from the soil, from trading, the other only of what was past, of what had died.

John was at once drawn and repelled by Andrei Sergeivich. On the one hand he thought that he had never

seen a more interesting face. The jaw which was set so firmly, the broad low brow, over which the smooth black hair was parted, and the live, quick-moving body, were those of a man of action, a soldier, as in fact Andrei Sergeivich had been. But the eyes that burned so fiercely and the passionate mouth that spoke so little were a contradiction. He seemed to care for no one but Kireiev, and even him he spoke to occasionally half contemptuously, as to a tiresome child. On these occasions the old fox would blush like a girl all over his brick-red face, to the roots of his curly black hair and beard. John he ignored entirely.

Whenever, as sometimes happened, their talk turned upon religion, he became completely silent, falling in upon himself in moody contemplation. John noticed one morning that a little gold cross hung round his neck under his shirt.

Day after day passed by, night after night, under the brilliant stars, amid the round black tents. They covered hundreds of versts of the rolling steppe, where the tall plumed grass was burned grey-brown by the summer heat, they crossed broad streams reduced to a mere trickle between high clay banks, and marched by the side of the wide Irtish, where sometimes the river spread into quiet pools among the reeds, whence the brown ducks flew at sunset, their wavering cry echoing into deep solitude.

One night, when they were camped by such a pool, it must have been just after they had left Semipalatinsk, John walked away from the others. It was an autumn night, slightly frosty, a crackling myriad of stars in the remote sky, and the stillness of vast plains enveloped him more completely with every step he took away from the camp, drawing him on till he felt when he sat down at last by the edge of the water as though eternity had swallowed him.

The night was gloriously bright. On the still surface of the water burned the reflected stars, little fires of wandering loveliness across the unrippling steely pool. The rushes whispered closely as the black ducks swam from their nests, from clump to clump, calling querulously, sadly.

He had hardly sat there five minutes when he heard a swift step over the hard ground and Andrei Sergeivich stood beside him. John could think of nothing to say to him, so he kept quiet. Nor did the other speak at first, but stood looking out over the pool, over the darkly swimming birds, into the far darkness beyond.

He turned to John at last, as though he just noticed him. "How old do you think I am?" he asked.

This was just what John did not know—he might have been anything between twenty-five and forty.

"Thirty-five?" he hazarded.

"Not thirty. Not quite thirty," the other replied. John did not know in the least what to say to him. He always felt a slight embarrassment when alone with Andrei Sergeivich; the latter had the knack of making one feel that he was not there at all, that the physical presence sitting or riding beside you was somewhere else, far away, living intensely in another life. John felt this so strongly that he was almost afraid to enter into a conversation with him, lest he too be drawn brutally and roughly into that mysterious existence.

He was afraid now, not almost afraid but really afraid, for he suddenly realized that there before his eyes this tall man with the set jaw and the burning glance was actually living his second existence, and that John was in it, whatever it was. "Not thirty, not quite thirty," he had said, but at that moment he did not look more than twenty-five, in the flower of his youth, his broad nostrils sniffing the beauty of the night like a young stallion's. John knew that

he was going to confide in him, and he felt an urgent impulse to get up and run away, anything so long as this man did not try to draw him into his suffering.

But he was already speaking again, and his voice was young and full, the voice of a young lover, of a poet.

"I have lived too much, Vanya" (why did he say "Vanya" so familiarly? It was the first time). "I am almost thirty and I have known every emotion of joy and suffering it is possible for a man to experience. They say there are great things going on in Russia today, that the people have stood the old upside-down world on its feet again and are building a new life which is no longer topsy-turvy, and I have no place in that world. I lived all my life before I was thirty, and now what is there left?"

He looked at John as though he really wanted an answer and John felt suddenly irritated.

"You can always die," he said coldly, hoping he would be offended and stop talking.

His companion laughed, as though at his innocence. "I have died. I am dead. If you mean why don't I drown or shoot myself—I cannot do it because the man who might have done that is dead already. Do you believe in God, Vanya?"

"No."

"Well, why should you, after all? But I do. I believe in God Eternal. I believe we are all parts of a living God —you, those ducks that are calling like lost souls, the steppe, myself, the whole universe, just reflections of an all-pervading, all-creative God."

John looked at him. He was sitting with his knees drawn up to his chin, staring moodily over the water.

"That is the only way I can find peace. I have ceased to live. I am content to be."

John stirred uneasily. This was not what he had expected—a confidence, yes, but not mere mysticism.

"A year ago I met a wandering Lama. He was clothed in rags that had once been red and yellow. He knew sixteen languages and had been in China, Mongolia, Tibet, India, Turkestan, wherever the people of his faith were dwelling. He had no possessions, no aim, save just to be, to wander from tent to tent, from town to town, sleeping where night overtook him beneath the sky, which is, so he told me, only the roof of that vast tent we call the world. I learned from him the nature of being, the truth of the one God."

John spoke at last.

"I don't believe a word you are saying. You live, but you are living in the past. You are only deluding yourself with your Lamas and your Gods. There is no God. There is nothing but life. I don't need to be thirty to know that. Live, live, live."

"Why?" asked the other dryly.

"Because you are alive."

"Live. Yes, live and suffer, horrors worse than hell. And then maybe become bored? Live through all that a man can live through? What then?"

"Then for God's sake, drown yourself. But I don't believe it."

"You don't know. Why do you say that? You are a boy and you don't know."

"Then why do you bother to speak to me?"

"Because I like you. You are surprised? All the same I do. I have noticed that you are always with the Kirghiz, that you drink up every word that Kireiev or Ali Hodja has to tell you about them, that you can already speak a few words of their tongue. Well, that is good. I have lived with them now for three years and I was glad to see you

were interested. In so far as I live at all, it is with them, and through them. That's all. I don't think I have any other reason for speaking, except the desire to hear my own voice."

He got up and walked away. When John got back to their tent he was not inside, so he told Yasha what had passed between them.

Yasha was interested. "So, our melancholy friend is a mystic, a romantic, John? He is right when he says he is dead. He was born in 1789 and died in 1917."

Kireiev was listening. "Andrusha is a good soul," he grumbled at them. "You know nothing of him, but he has reason enough to be as he is."

Yasha laughed. "You aren't dead, Ilya Fedorich. A Cossack, a kulak, a merchant, there's tough stock; but you can bend to save yourself when the hurricane blows. He couldn't and he's been uprooted. But what ails the man?"

"Ask his bitch of a wife in Moscow. Ask the dead." And that was all he would tell them, beyond that he thought that Andrei Sergeivich's wife was some sort of a gipsy singer in Moscow. The rest he could not, or would not, tell just then.

CHAPTER IV

NIGHTS are long around the tent fires of the steppe. Tales are the common currency of human intercourse, where there are no books and few able to read. In that long journey over the plains, into the hills and forests of Semirechiye, into the great mountains that rise above Vierni, the travellers grew close to one another, were the whole world for one another, and soon their intercourse knew few reticences, their hearts contained no secrets. In time they heard Andrusha's story.

At first it came in little pieces, in odd references to the time he had spent on the island with the Kireievs, or to the Volga steppes and the break-up of the White armies. As old Ali Hodja used to say, "Yurekden yureye yolvar," "There is a road from heart to heart," and they found the road at last.

There is one much travelled road from heart to heart among men—the road of women. Five men meeting together night after night on the long autumn evenings are bound to talk of woman, talk which Ali Hodja enlivened with cynical Eastern proverbs, Kireiev with scandalous anecdotes, and Yasha with shrewd analysis. John and Andrusha did not have much to say, the first because he knew too little, the latter because he knew too much.

Andrei Sergeivich began his story on a certain night during one of those steppe thunderstorms, when the very sky opens like the slamming of the bronze gates of Heaven in a divine whirlwind, when the rain falls as though from some immense celestial tank and sleep becomes impossible for man and beast. They huddle within the tents like forlorn children, lost and afraid, beneath the unearthly rage of the storm.

As Andrei Sergeivich spoke the images he evoked seemed to rise up before John out of the storm itself—each deafening clap of thunder brought a picture of some strained and passionate human being, torn and maddened by that love of which he had heard so much and as yet seen nothing. All through the night, when the wife and daughter and sons of Ali Hodja had fallen to restless sleep in the tent, despite the raging storm outside, and the soft murmur of voices within, Andrusha unfolded his story. But it did not finish that night. Not for some time after did John hear all, though every time he sat listening to him in the tent he could not escape the feeling that here was a life being enacted before him, and that through the

very act of hearing he was becoming a part of that life. . . . "She was not in the ordinary sense a beautiful woman," Andrusha assured them. Her name and her father's—Natalia Yulevna. The surname doesn't matter. Fair, rather pale always, and her lower lip very full and drooping, as though heavy with the promise of love.

"When she was seventeen she married—Alexei Karamsin, a captain of the hussar regiment in which I was a subaltern. Alyosha and I were friends, no ordinary friends either, but an inseparable pair, such as you will find only among soldiers or sailors, sharing everything with one another, 'the two lovers,' they used to call us in the regiment. I was the only one he ever talked to about his wife. He wasn't the sort of chap to say much about anything. One of those quiet, rather pale, tense men who give the impression of holding down great floods of passionate feeling, partly by sheer will-power, partly because of real inability to express their feelings in speech. There are such men, you know, whose whole life is lived by the light of some ideal and who by sheer intensity of feeling on that ideal find themselves tongue-tied and silent because mere words seem so foolish to express what they feel. Well, it was so with Alyosha.

"I had not seen his wife, for he married her in Petersburg, and a month later we were at the front, riding across East Prussia. At Tannenburg Alyosha made a name for himself, a fame which quite by chance got beyond the army till he found he was for a short time a national hero. It was nothing much, a piece of cool, well-calculated daring, quite in accordance with his steel-bound, burning temper. It spread because people wanted something to relieve the gloomy horror of that catastrophe.

"Natasha was an idealistic sort of girl, and when he went back to 'Peter' to lie in hospital, covered with crosses and glory, he seemed to her the incarnation of the heroic

Russian spirit. She was little more than a schoolgirl then, you must remember, and such phrases as that came easily to her—'the heroic Russian spirit.'

"As for Alyosha, he should have been in Paradise, loved by this girl whom he loved so passionately. But that was just the trouble. He knew that really she didn't love him, that he was only her romance, her heroic Russian, and that wasn't enough, because it wasn't him.

"He was so quiet, Alyosha, not tall either, but well built, and musing blue eyes in his pale face, not a bit like a hero. He remained at home a whole year before he was fit for service again, and during that time they drifted apart.

"Why? I still don't know exactly. You see, in the beginning it was a family marriage, an alliance between two rich and noble houses (Oh yes, that sort of thing really happened only a few years back). Then there was her little burst of romantic affection, and I suppose it faded. He was so quiet, the incident was so soon forgotten in the grim and dreary business of the war, when heroes became almost unpopular in the army, and began to be taken with a pinch of salt at home, because, you know, there were so many of them.

"Natasha was not yet a woman, and she was deeply religious. By the end of that year she had begun to change. In the old days before the war there had been mad nights at her parents' house in Petersburg. Dancing till dawn, the girls drinking champagne from their slippers—a pretty fast social set even for the old days—and in between a chain of visits, operas, plays, lectures, discussions on religion, socialism, Pan-Slavism and God knows what other 'isms.'

"During the war all that just dropped away as though it had never been. She had been plump and became quite thin, she had been gay and became sadly wise. She was

fundamentally honest, and when she thought she no longer loved Alyosha she ceased relations with him. They still lived together, but apart. He said nothing, though his days were torment, till at the beginning of '16 he rejoined the regiment in Galicia.

"We renewed our old friendship. I guessed a little and heard a little of what he was suffering, but I did not know Natasha then and there was much that didn't become clear to me till later.

"When the Revolution came, like thousands of other officers, we found ourselves without soldiers to command, and drifted back to Petrograd. His wife had gone down to Samara, to some property belonging to his family, and Alyosha suggested we join her there and await events.

" 'If the new Russia comes,' he used to say, 'it will be out of the heart of the country, from the Volga, from the Urals, but never out of Moscow or Petersburg. Down there we shall find some work and our time will come again."

"So we went, and I met her, a few weeks before the Bolshevik Revolution, when their country house had been burned by the peasants and she was living in a little two-roomed flat at the top of a big apartment house.

"They asked me to share that flat."

CHAPTER V

"We were a very platonic household. I slept on a couch in the one room, Alyosha on the floor in the other and she on the only bed. During those first six months of 1918 we were all too busy with what we considered to be the salvation of Russia to think much about one another. To be sure, I had no such passionate conviction in what I was doing as those two. When I was

running to and fro between the Czechs and the French Mission and the Cossack generals in Orenburg, it was simply because it was the thing for a man with my connections to do, and I did it, I suppose, just as efficiently and actively as any one else. Indeed, after the Czechs were driven out and the new Workers' Government set up in Samara, our secret work became far more dangerous, and then I began to take even more delight in it, as though it were a kind of sport, and also that I might get my own back on those uncouth clowns who were pretending to rule us at that time—for it was in that light I saw them.

"But this terrible thing, this love, did not come to me for some time. Then it was quite suddenly—with the sickening effect of a blow on the head. Yes, it hit me as completely as that—and her too, just a chance glance one early autumn morning as we walked by the river.

"I had been in love before, many times, with all sorts of women; but this, I can tell you, was as though eternity had suddenly clutched at my heart. Eternity.

"Why did she give herself to me? To this day I don't know. Perhaps I fired one of those vivid dreams in her rich imagination. Maybe she had some high illusions about me, or maybe she was just starved for the love which she ignored in her husband; for hers was a warm, sympathetic nature and she had to love somehow.

"She seemed the very poetry of love to me, though I had known women more beautiful, or more passionate, or more tender, or more intelligent, but never one who so united beauty and passion and tenderness and intelligence.

"She lives before me now" (and before those in the smoky tent too, a vision of her rose and took life). "Small, but slender and firmly built, her hair the colour of the corn on those great Volga steppes, dark brows and lashes shading her clear hazel eyes. Her hands were white, with long delicate fingers, and I can see the little blue veins in

them now, as they were when she tapped the ash from her cigarette or played upon her cigarette-holder with her fingers."

Andrei Sergeivich turned to Ali Hodja. "Ali Hodja, have you ever known a young man among the Kazaks who has fallen in love with a horse?"

The Kirghiz nodded. "Indeed, my wife's brother was such a one. In truth he sickened like a young man for a maid, he refused to eat, wandering about pale and unsatisfied from camp to camp, ready to sacrifice or wife or wealth to attain his desire, all for a black stallion of Badakshan owned by a Tadjik merchant from Andijan. He came back to the Tadjik in the end and slew him to take the horse. He was hanged in the citadel by the Tsar's soldiers. There are indeed such young men among us."

"Just so it was with me. I am only alive when in love, and from the desire to possess Natasha I began to live a strange violent life that would otherwise have been impossible for me.

"In one sense I did possess her, but that was not enough, for I could feel at once that she did not really love me any more than she had really loved Alyosha when she married him. Her feeling for me was a sudden passion, a storm in her delicate nature, while her real life ran calm and deep far below, out of my reach, so that I could not even sense its direction. Of course she did not know it. She was not a woman to give herself for a whim, yet to me, who knew this very well, the idea that she was not wholly and absolutely mine became torture.

"My love for her was my life—dragged me up into another world. For a time I kept my doubts to myself, but in the end I must begin to torment her also with my wild threats and fears, until she must have thought me mad. Yet she stayed faithful to me, tenderly passionate as only she could be.

"Life did not stand still for us. Alyosha knew from the

very first day by one of those terrible instincts that come to such single-hearted men, though he never showed by word or sign that he knew.

"I tell you there is no worse tragedy than to have loaded all one's happiness into the frail hull of a fellow human being, and that we had both of us done.

"No, he never showed that he knew, though maybe he became a little quieter and his blue eyes glittered more intensely, though that might have been hunger, for we were suffering in another way, all three of us, as the whole country was beginning to suffer during those bare and bitter years. Afterwards I knew that from that day he was torn between his love for her and a cold, bitter hatred for myself, that he only restrained himself for her sake by using that terrible will of his. You see, he didn't want to hurt anything she cared for, and in his heart he had the most positive, tremendous assurance that one day she would be his, wholly, absolutely, beyond all challenge.

"From the end of August to the end of October our love lasted, now well, now ill, but on my part ever more intensely, with a madder desire to break through that reserve I could feel was keeping me from the deepest things in her. You see I had never loved like this before. With all the world rocking to pieces about us, she alone seemed stable, eternal, a symbol of hope and escape. For the Revolution took no notice of us three and our little affairs, but moved on huge and terrifying, a primitive force that seemed to have been gathering strength from the very birth of society.

"In the beginning of November the crisis came. Food was short, Natasha was ill, so ill as to cause us to have the worst fears, and on the top of all that we heard that we were in hourly danger of arrest. Down south, not so very far away, was Dutov's Cossack army in Orenburg forming a front against the Bolsheviks, and we decided to join them.

"This was how the crisis came. An old servant of Natasha's found two Red passports from somewhere and a horse and sleigh. Two passports for a man and wife.

"We sat there, in the cold little room on the top of the apartment building, half-starved. The old peasant stood there in his shaggy sheepskin, his cap in one hand, the two well-thumbed passports in the other, tousle-headed and bearded, while Alyosha and I looked at him and then at the passports, fascinated, hardly hearing what he said, and yet understanding only too well.

"Two passports, for man and wife, who was to take them?

"Natasha was sitting by the window, her chin on her hand. When the old man had finished his explanation, she looked up, looked at Alyosha, seemed to look at him quite steadily for an age—though it can only have been for a second, since the peasant noticed nothing. But to us, to all three of us, it seemed an age.

" 'We must go soon, at once, Alyosha,' she said.

"And we all three were conscious then that we knew what was in the hearts of each of us.

"As for the old man, he put the passports down on the table and followed Natasha's look, but quite naturally, for he knew that Alyosha was her husband, his own master, that was all.

" 'You see, Alexei Mihaelich,' the peasant said slowly, 'it is this way. The sleigh will easily hold you, both Natalia Yulevna and yourself, and you won't have much trouble—"

CHAPTER VI

And, in fact, it took them both. Why did she go with him? Perhaps I had tormented her too much; perhaps, and I think this is the truth, she was much more

ill than even we imagined, and already her thoughts were beginning to turn back to the man she had first gone to, four years before, when she was still a girl.

"To me she simply said that he was her husband and that in such a desperate case her duty was with him. When the whole country was falling to pieces before our eyes, was that the time to forget one's religion, to leave a good man, and go venturing on the seas of passion? We should meet again in Orenburg—one day things would become normal again. The Bolsheviks could not last, and when the world was sane once more we could think of our love, of divorce, of flight, if necessary. But not now. Not when everything was in danger, country, religion, all that was dear.

"Some such arguments she used, and though I was not convinced, perhaps Natasha more than half believed in them: I cannot tell you, for she was never mine, never really mine, and in the end the truth of her life went to another, to her own husband. Yet today she is only alive in me, only alive because of me."

He stopped for a moment. When he took up the story again it was clear there had been something he wanted to say, and then decided it was better kept silent.

"They went, dressed as peasants in that peasant's sleigh, and I saw them off, saw the sleigh disappear into the dark, heard for a moment the muffled sound of the horse trotting over the half-frozen road. I never saw her again.

"But he told me everything. Oh yes, in Orenburg, Alyosha made sure that I heard every tiny detail from his own lips, every word she uttered on that awful journey, I daresay, and even every little action. That was his revenge. To show me slowly, in detail, how she came to love him, she who had never fully given herself to either of us up to our parting.

"There is no doubt about it, and he was quite aware that I knew from the first that every word he spoke was truth, that on that journey she had grown to love him just as absolutely as he loved her, completely, wonderfully. She came to him like a virgin, and all the torment of years was soothed away in those few days they had of perfect understanding.

"Perhaps you don't follow how complete that love must have been. I tell you again, she was the very poetry of love, and the man who loved her and had her whole love in return, knew an ecstasy that could give him the very meaning and completion of life. With a woman like Natasha it was no easy task to find the key to her heart. And what Alyosha found there is what I shall never know —what he would not and could not tell me, though he told me everything else, everything.

"She died of pneumonia in a peasant's hut. It was at a little Tartar village on the banks of the Ural, about fifty versts from Orenburg.

"They lit a great fire on the snow to soften the ground and he dug her grave himself, on a knoll overlooking the frozen river. There was no church and no Christian cemetery in the village, and the Tartars helped him to lower her into the grave, while he himself filled it up and set a wooden cross over the little mound of earth.

"I reached Orenburg before him, for he had been held up by her illness, while I had managed to use the railroad during nearly half my journey, dangerous though that was. When I saw him come limping into the mess-room and the Junker school, pale and bearded, with a revolver strapped round the peasant's shuba, I knew at once what had happened, because he looked happy. Yes, he looked straight past me as he spoke, happily, as though he were seeing some beauty that was concealed from the rest of us.

"'She is dead, Andrei Sergeivich. She died in my arms four days ago, and now there is nothing left, very much, to do. Except one thing.' That was what he said.

"Then he left me for a while. When he came back he was shaven and in uniform. Then I learned what the one thing was. It was to tell me about her, to tell me everything, except just the one thing I was never to know—what it was I had not obtained from her, what richness of beauty and love had fallen to him alone.

"All through the siege we stuck together, we two, bound by our love for that woman and our hatred for each other, so that even at the end, when the assault came on the Cadet School, after the stern fighting between the station and the town, we stuck together, fighting like two devils. I didn't leave him until I was certain that no mortal hand could help him again, and then I laid him all broken and bloody on a table amid the wreckage of a burning mess-room. I made my own way out over the high wall and into the town.

"A little group of us were cut off and dodged through the gardens into the jumble of wooden houses beyond the Bashkir caravanserai, fighting all the way. Somehow or other I escaped into one of those houses, a place in a wide muddy lane, and was hidden there till everything was over. The people of the house burned my uniform in the stove and gave me the clothes of a son who was away in Siberia fighting with Kolchak.

"Kind and rather foolish people, I remember, though I noticed but little of them. They thought that I was broken by the fighting. But it was not the fighing. I was broken because I did not know any longer who I was, or where, or why. Alyosha had been very successful in his revenge."

CHAPTER VII

"I SUPPOSE haunting is just a word to you, something rather fantastic and exaggerated. But I assure you it can be real. When I came to myself again, I made the discovery that Natasha was not dead, that as long as I lived I was to be haunted, not by her, but by that terrible, ever-unsatisfied desire to have her with me always, to know her completely, her whole soul.

"Before I knew her, I was a careless roving sort of chap. At home you couldn't tell me from the peasant, an ordinary man of the people; in the regiment I was always with the horses, or dressed up and making love to some woman. Horses and women, they were the dominating passions of my life, and I could never pass by a beautiful horse or a beautiful woman without an insane desire of possession. And I was pretty often successful. A bit of a hero in love, they considered me, and devilish lucky with my horses. I was gay too, and a good companion,—all that must have drawn Natasha to me in the first place, for I was vital enough, quite rich enough in character to have inspired one of those compelling dreams of hers.

"Now that was all gone. She was dead, but no one else existed for me apart from her. Day and night the vision of her was with me: those little white hands of hers, so delicately veined, I could almost feel them in mine, but they were cold, cold, and nothing I could do could warm them again with the swift passion that had once been there.

"So I left Orenburg, just wandered out on to the steppe, without knowing why, or where. My mind was in a storm, like the storm that is raging now outside, and I just wandered into that wide Kirghiz steppe, until Ilya Fedorich picked me up and made something of a man out of me once again. Yet I tell you, she still lives a pale ghost out

there in the rain and storm, a pale ghost but still breathing and alive, and I am still alive, only because I want to know and must know, what it was Alyosha had from her, and which I never possessed. Because you see, in a way I am the same as I have always been—horse or woman, if the fit takes me, I must have them completely." And he laughed dejectedly.

John noticed that his jaw was set with a kind of inhuman determination, and that beneath the broad, low brow his deep eyes were burning steadily, as though trying to rouse flame from the dying embers of the tent fire on which they were set. In spite of himself John was impressed. In spite of himself, because he felt he had heard only a very little part of the truth. Andrusha was no monomaniac, apart from certain moods that came over him from time to time, as, for example, on that night when John had spoken with him on the edge of the marsh, watching the ducks swimming over the dark waters.

Far oftener he would be both gay and masterful, a good companion and a ready-witted leader.

They talked but little longer after Andrusha had finished. In spite of the storm old Ali Hodja was nodding, only politeness imposing on him at least the form of listening to this conversation. John himself was tired, and insensibly fell into a thunder-shaken doze, out of which from time to time he half awoke and sensed rather than saw Andrei Sergeivich still sitting upright, a dark shadow brooding sightlessly over the ashes of the fire.

CHAPTER VIII

ANDRUSHA avoided them the following day, riding behind with Ali Hodja's son, refusing to acknowledge the little group of Europeans. John was more and more

impressed by him as the long days vanished behind them and their journey's end came nearer. By now he knew enough Kirghiz to overhear that Andrusha with the nomads was a very different person from the romantic misanthrope he appeared in their European company. Rather he was there once again the gay companion, talking of hawking and hunting and horses, discussing the affairs of clans and migrations, telling a rude herdsman's tale or singing a frank herdsman's song. Yet in his other moods he had impressed John with two things hitherto unknown to him—mystical religion and romantic love—so that he began to feel a desire to probe into and discover for himself the truth of these also.

Yasha was talking to Ilya Fedorich. The old Cossack's round hat was pushed forward over his sweating brow, always with him a sign of thought, one little hand at the end of the enormous muscled arm was raised from time to time to gesticulate vigorously over the horse's head as he replied to Yasha's remarks.

"I am a workman, Ilya Fedorich," Yasha was saying, "and you're a Cossack, a man of the people like myself, for all your damned money-grabbing. Now tell me, what in God's name is one to make of our friend behind? Is he mad with his talk of haunting women, or is there something else he didn't tell us that's on his mind? I ask you, what does it mean, when he says he didn't know that woman? Isn't he deceiving himself with sentimental nonsense? What is there he couldn't know about her? I like the plain truth myself."

Kireiev's little bright brown eyes assumed their look of a worried child. A quick circular gesture of his free hand pushed the fur cap even farther forward.

"Ai, ai, ai, my friend, he's not crazy, not by any means. Of course, he's a bit sentimental, but they're all like that, these bourgeois when they go chasing after women. All

the same, he's been through it, and no mistake. I love that boy like my own son, though there was many a day I wished I'd left the bastard to die where I found him. No, he's not crazy, and he's not so unhappy as he pretends, either."

"He's not," John cut in. " 'Way behind he's as merry as a cricket with the Kirghiz."

"That's it," sighed Kireiev, "he won't live like a Christian. One day he'll take a couple of Kirghiz girls and set up his tent among the Kazaks. He's not done with life yet, not by any means."

"But he says so. He says he is dead because there is nothing left in life he hasn't suffered," persisted John.

"Aye, he says so, he says so. Yet mark my words, he will be living in his yurt before the year's out with a brace of Kazak girls."

"Then it's change he's after, nothing else," said Yasha. "I know these passionate men of the Old World. They build their life on a woman, they make a world of their own out of sex, it crumbles, and they have nothing left. Life is too strong for them now, so they creep aside to live with the nomads, because we have no time to admire their romantic melancholy in Russia today."

Yasha spoke with the impatience of a man who sees clearly, who has a task to fulfil and finds his life rich enough in its fulfilment. But in John there still lingered a subtle poison of romanticism that had dropped softly into his ear with Andrusha's tale. At the thought of that woman, so white and beautiful and warm with passion and love, a swift stirring in his heart prevented him from dismissing Andrusha altogether, as Yasha did. This was something so different from the harbour-side of an American seaport, from the suburban free love of Murphy and Co. He wanted to know more, for somehow, though it was not his world, neither did it seem quite to belong to the

only other world he knew of, that of the parsons and millionaires, of expensive automobiles, large houses and sacrosanct playgrounds. So John pursued the matter further.

"But he did marry again?" he asked Kireiev. "You said something about his having a wife in Moscow. Who is she?"

"Ah, that damned gipsy bitch. Yes, he did marry, worse luck on him! Now that's a woman to keep clear of, if you should ever run across her. I'd as soon sleep with a handful of snakes—and there was a time when I thought differently about her, I might tell you. A time when I hunted all over our island for Andrusha, blind mad with anger, swearing I'd shoot him dead for her."

In perturbed recollection the little hand with quick twist of that hairy wrist pushed the hat back off his ruddy brow, on which the sweat stood out in brighter, pearlier drops, as though in shiny sympathy for that stormy reminiscence.

"I think you might tell us of that, Ilyusha," Yasha said. "I've always thought there was something between you two. Men don't see ghosts just because a woman has died, not unless there is something else to make them regret that woman. Besides, she didn't love him, and he has had another one since, which rather makes me think that haunting he talked of isn't very permanent."

"No," admitted Kireiev, "it isn't. But all the same there was a time when he was really haunted by the thought of that woman, just as he says. And one proof is that another woman, a pretty one, too, made love to him soon after and he wouldn't have anything to do with her. Now you know yourselves what kind of a man he is. It's just as he says —he can't keep away from a fine horse or a beautiful woman. It's just the same today as it always was with him,

though now he'll only look at Kirghiz women and he'll have nothing to do with Russians."

"What did happen to him, then?" asked John. "Did he wander off, just as he said, anyhow over the Kirghiz steppe?"

"He did, though not for long. Oh, that was a queer story he told me afterwards. You know, at that time a man simply couldn't wander just anyhow over the hungry steppe. The Kirghiz themselves had little enough to eat and they were suspicious of Russians, Red or White. I've lived among them all my life, and I'm known from Omsk to Auli Ata, from Kazalinsk to Kustanai, but at that time I didn't venture very far from home myself, I can tell you. Besides, what was there to do? Your Revolution stopped all business, it brought the Kirghiz nearly to starvation and they didn't know their own friends any longer."

"No," laughed Yasha, "but they began to know their enemies, and some of them looked very like some of their former friends. What about our Andrusha—what happened to him?"

"Why, to some extent what he told you last night was true, he doesn't know. Hardship and starvation, I suppose. But in the end he was picked up by a troop of cavalry, kind of partisans. And, my God, what a crew! The commander was a woman—a red-haired girl from the Baltic provinces —Sonia, I think her name was, and by all accounts she was a hot little beast. They wanted to shoot him at first, but she wasn't having it, for something about our Andrusha tickled her fancy, so she persuaded them to give him the choice of being shot or joining their troop. Well, he still had enough life in him not to want to die and he'd reached the stage where he didn't care a damn for Red or White, so he joined."

"All the same, I should have thought he wouldn't have minded being shot so much," Yasha interrupted slyly.

Ilya Fedorich looked up at him and chuckled. "Yes, maybe. Yet you must remember that wandering up there on the steppe we can't know what went through his mind. He doesn't even know himself now. I dare say there was a time when it was all the same to him whether he went on living or whether he lay down in the grass and died. Nevertheless, just at that time, apparently he wanted to live. They were wild folk who picked him up, a few Cossacks, one or two Kirghiz, some peasants from the Volga and an American who was a sort of second-in-command."

"What, a real American?" John asked curiously.

"Well, he'd been to America. I don't know what he was really—a Lett, or a Rumanian, or a Laplander, what does it matter? At least, he wasn't a Russian and he'd been to America, so I always called him the American when Andrusha used to talk to me about those times. It seems he was a little, oldish man, with a grey thatch, and cunning as the devil. Always talking of blood, as though he were in love with it, but couldn't get satisfaction.

"Their troop was riding south in the rear of the Red Army which was pursuing Dutov. So Andrusha found himself chasing after the very people he'd been fighting with. They commandeered a train and caught up with their own army, but before that it seems this Sonia had got quite crazy about him and made him her lieutenant in place of the American. Andrusha just laughed at her, in that cold way he has, that's like a splash of sea on a foggy night.

"As for the American, he went red mad with jealousy, for you see he'd always been trusted before and he had a kind of crush on this girl himself. But the worst was having to take orders from Andrusha. He cursed, and drank and threatened, though it wasn't any good, for the others

were all backing up Andrusha. In the first place they liked him, because he didn't fall for the girl and they knew that if one of them had had her, why they'd all have gone for her, and then, don't you see, there'd have been shooting. Moreover, Andrusha's a soldier, and he knew what he was about, so they liked him for that as well.

"Then the army got into the desert round the Aral Sea, where it's all sand and clay, bare as a bleached camel-bone. Luckily they kept to the railway, which was still working in a way, or they'd all have died in the sand.

"There's a little town on the north end of the Aral Sea, just called Aralskoe Morei after the sea. And here they caught up Dutov's crowd and nearly wiped them out. In that fight Andrusha and his troop did something pretty good, I believe, a flank charge over the sand dunes that captured a machine-gun nest and started the rout.

"That settled things with the American; he couldn't bear to see Andrusha getting all the glory, while this plump Sonia with her red hair and her man's clothes was looking at him till the eyes were near dropping out of her head with a love that gaped for every one to see.

"They caught a few prisoners and one of them recognized Andrusha. The American thought that now he had found his opportunity, but there was this Sonia, still sticking up for him, swearing the prisoner was a liar and that Andrusha was all right. Besides, he had led that charge. Only the American was set against him, though the rest didn't really care one way or the other.

"All the same, Andrusha began to see that apart from Sonia he wouldn't have much chance with them, and then she began to badger him to sleep with her or she'd denounce him.

"Well, the thought of it made him sick. That ought to show you that he had really cared for his Natasha, since he wasn't the sort of chap to stick at a silly little thing like

that when his own life might be at stake. Besides, she was a pretty little bitch, and she wanted him hot enough; he needn't have cared.

"But he did. And between the two of them, Sonia and the American, he saw he would have to get out. So he stole the best horse he could find and made off south—just went off in the same way as he had cleared out of Orenburg. Lucky for him the horses were all worn to skeletons, with no fodder but reeds from the lakes and a little dry sage brush. With a night's start there was no chance of being caught so long as he kept away from the railway.

"He made off down the seacoast. The sea there, you must understand, just laps up against the sand of the desert, and there are no trees, or fresh springs, or green things growing. Here and there you can find little lakes, but the water isn't drinkable, though they are good for duck-shooting. In fact, that stretch is almost as God-forsaken as the country round Balkash.

"If he had got to the mouth of the Syr Daria, he might have found refuge in a fisherman's hut. They are mostly Old-Believing Cossacks of the Ural, and about as fond of the Bolsheviks as I am. At least, he would have found fresh water and a few shady trees.

"But that half-starved screw he was riding couldn't carry him. He rode her out the first night trying to put some distance between himself and the army, and she died beneath him at the beginning of the third day, before he was halfway to the river. He ought to have done better, but he was lost in that maze of lakes, large and small, that hide the Delta.

"When the horse died he just trudged on, with nothing to eat, sipping occasionally from the lake water, which is salt enough in places to have done him no good. By the sixth day he was actually on the seashore, within a mile of the wide beds of reeds that mark the mouth of the Syr.

"And there I found him. He wasn't a hundred yards

from where my boat was hidden, nor a quarter of a mile from the fisherman's hut I used to visit secretly for news, or provisions that we were running short of on the island. That's how we came together—I just picked him up like a sack of flour and dumped him in the boat, without thinking at all, without much caring whether he was dead or alive. And if he had died before we made the island—well, I'd just have dumped him in the sea about as easily as I'd dumped him into the boat. But he didn't die, though he never came to until he was lying in our cave with that damned Neura kneeling by him, a cup of hot ewe's milk in her hand.

"Yes, she was the first person he saw when he came round, though we were all standing by, I, my wife, the three children and the Kirghiz boy.

"But I can't tell you any more now. With Andrusha riding just behind there I'm afraid to." He pushed the hat forward again over his brow with his chubby freckled hand. "Why, you know, I can't help but think he'd hear me, or at least know what I was telling you. He suffered so much from that girl, he'd feel the very air tremble if I began to talk of her now, and he's almost within earshot. Wait till he's sleeping one night with Ali Hodja's boys in the small tent. Then I promise that you shall hear every word."

Nor indeed would he have spoken any more of his friend to them on that day, but for a happy chance.

CHAPTER IX

As it happened, that very night Andrei Sergeivich chose to sleep among his adopted people, in the tent of Ali Hodja's married son. So Kireiev continued the story by the dim light of the tent fire, which mostly was only a dull glow of burning dung, fanned to occasional flame

as one of the women put on some gnarled and knotty roots of saxaul. When it died altogether, they had a small kerosene lamp, smoky and ill-smelling. Outside there was no such glare of continual lightning as had lit Andrusha's story the night before, or blinding thunderclaps that seemed to shake the very earth they sat on. There was the peace of the evening in the more solitary places of the world, a peace that was deepened by the occasional sounds from the animals outside, by the monotonous strumming of a Kirghiz lute and the droning of a shepherd's song from one of the tents. Presently these sounds fell away and only Kireiev's voice could be heard, deep and rather hoarse, broken in its monotony only by a very occasional rich chuckle, or by questions from his two listeners.

"I was in the fishing business on the Aral Sea when the Revolution came. You know it was a good business in war-time while food was getting scarce and I had my own steamer that took the fish to the curing-houses at Aralskoe Morei station on the Orenburg railway, or up the river to Kazalinsk. Well, a man like me doesn't get on in business without making enemies and we were a pretty wild lot over there on the Kirghiz steppe. I don't know what the Revolution was like in other parts of Russia, but with us it was a question of paying back old scores more than of classes or parties. For there are no classes to speak of among the Russians in that part of the steppe."

Here Yasha interrupted. "Yes," Kireiev granted him, "there are the fishermen, but except for the Cossacks round the river deltas they too are mostly Kirghiz. The Russians that aren't merchants or owners of their own boats are mostly wastrels. Anyhow, we were always one against the other, fighting for wagons on the railway to get the first batch of fish to Moscow, running one another's boats down in the night, or cutting up the nets, to get the first catch ashore and cured. And I was generally first.

"In 1918 I got the tip to clear out, and I went. We sailed one night to an uninhabited island that no one ever visited because of some Kirghiz superstition, and there I fixed my family in a large dry cave, with a natural chimney. I brought over some stock, plenty of clothes, all provisions, and determined we would stay there until the storm had blown over. You see, I'm pretty fond of my children and I didn't want them to grow up in the sort of hell that was going on then and continued for two years after.

"We brought Neura with us. She was my wife's discovery. She had brought her in to help in the house when she was about thirteen, and she had stayed with us ever since. When we went to the island she must have been seventeen. I don't know where she came from, or who her parents were, or even if they were both Russian, but she was as like the devil's own child as you can imagine.

"A dark little gipsy at first. But she soon grew into something I can't describe to you. I'm not a poet and I can't read, but she had hair that was blue-black like a raven's, long and thick, and her eyes were dark, so very dark that they seemed to be black also. When she walked she had the grace of a young tiger and she was all a man wants in a woman, breasts and hips and ankles, all perfect, and burned brown by the sun.

"She had a temper, too. The very way she looked at you was half wild, like a beast's, but she had never tried her tricks on with me, for though not once in my life had I raised my hand against my own children, I'm a Cossack, and I am known all over the Syr Daria district as being a man that nobody ever trifled with more than once. She knew in those days that I wouldn't have thought twice before I tanned her hide for her.

"That was the woman his eyes first saw when he came to. In that cave he must have thought it was some witch's

hell he'd been carried off to. But he just drank off the milk she offered him like a hungry baby and gave no sign.

"When he was better we lived together happily enough. Andrusha was no stranger to eating simply and working hard, so that in time I grew to rely on him as on my own right hand. The children were young, you know, my boy only fourteen, the girls twelve and five. Andrusha and the Kirghiz boy even managed to catch some of the wild horses on the island and break them in for our use. Oh, I can tell you, in a few months we were like brothers.

"Well, the island was all right, as islands go, and if there had been a few houses, and a bit more company, and samagonka to drink at night in between the songs, I would be living there yet. For I do like a simple life, and I'm a good Christian. Indeed, I'm a sort of Tolstoian, comrades, I don't believe in churches and all that sort of thing, and I hate a Pope worse than the devil, except when he's a good fellow and drinks a little.

"Another thing that was wrong with that island was that I had to be constantly with my wife, who is a good soul, but constant presence is not the best way to make a man appreciate what a good soul his wife is. I'm a wild sort, and I love above all the company of men like myself, but I must have a woman when I want one, or else I go crazy. Well, that's natural enough, isn't it? It was my bad luck that the only girl there was that little black devil Neura. My bad luck, too, that I had picked up Andrusha and brought him out to my kingdom instead of leaving him to die where he was—and maybe his bad luck as well.

"I hadn't thought of her in that way at first, for of course you don't, when a girl's been in your house since she was a kid, and you have come to think of her almost as one of the family. But on that island I had too much time to think and I thought about everything a man can

think of, till at last I began to think of her. But it appears I was too late. There was something between her and Andrusha already. He told me all about it afterwards, when we had made things up again.

"'You know,' he said, 'this island is hellish lonely, Ilyusha, and damnably beautiful.' (And in fact, comrades, the island is beautiful. One day, when I have my own steamer again, that you rogues have stolen from me, I will take you there.) 'That ride,' Andrusha went on to tell me, 'when I deserted from the Red Army, nearly finished me. When I rode away I didn't know where I was going, and if I had never become conscious again after collapsing by the seashore, well, that would have been all the same, for I was pretty tired of life. Then I woke up in your cave and a girl with black eyes like deep pools was bending over me. That Neura of yours is life itself, just burning with it, and she pulled me back by the force of her own strength and the fire in her limbs.' Andrusha used to talk that way, though he doesn't now unless he's got a mood on him.

"Still, you see the way of it. The girl had indeed the fire of a wild young filly in her. When I began to think about her, the first thing that struck me was that she just burned with all a man could desire.

"Yet Andrusha didn't take much notice of her at first. Not for some months. We lived quietly the winter through, and then in the warm weather he took her. He told me how it happened. He saw her bathing in the sea and the water was so blue and her body so bright, with the black hair falling round it, that he just ran into the sea and carried her out. She didn't object. I suppose she'd been thinking a bit herself, being just about the age for it.

"Now I can tell you I'm a hot, passionate man. I've near killed a man with my bare fists before now, and in the matter of a woman no one had ever crossed me up till then.

Besides, I'd got into the way of thinking she was mine, a part of the house. And then when that great desire for her came over me, on the lonely island, and I found that he had already got her, I felt like murder. I shot at him and missed and the same day he went away with her to another part of the island.

"That was in the spring. In the spring when the grass shoots up a foot in one night and the gay tulips blow upon the steppe. You don't know it—spring upon the steppe, so you can't understand the madness that sometimes comes with it, breaking out from the winter prison where only the vodka has kept a man's spirit warm.

"In that way we began to live apart, but it wasn't to be for long. It seemed they had got wind at last of where I was hiding and four men put off in a boat to seek me, men who had a very particular desire that I should never return from that island. They landed just before dawn and trudged inland to a height whence they hoped to spy me out. As it chanced, that proved their undoing.

"Andrusha had been up, too, out with a gun he had stolen from me, searching for breakfast for his woman. He saw them and followed. He watched them scatter to find our cave and come together again to lay their plans as soon as it was discovered.

"Now, that was not easy for them. There was but one entrance to the cave and the approach of a stranger would have been noted by us at once, so they could only sit quiet and wait for me to come out. Andrusha took it all in and made off back to his own place to change his shot gun for something more substantial, praying I didn't come out till he was back.

"As it happened my youngest girl had a stomach-ache of some sort that day, and I stayed in for a while to doctor her. By that lucky chance he was able to get back and cover our four friends in good time. Moreover, when I

did come out, I came out armed, because of Andrusha, you see. Not that I was still meaning to shoot him, but because where a woman's concerned, you can't make too sure. I might have suddenly felt like shooting him, or he like having a pot at me, and in either case where would I have been had I gone out unarmed?

"Anyhow, those four men never left that island again. They didn't even have time to think about the good home they'd left behind, before it was all over.

"Well, after that business I saw I had been an old fool. For those two were young and brisk, and although I'm still a sturdy one in love, there's no denying that Andrusha has the advantage of me. We all began to live together again, my fit passed, and soon I was thinking no more of Neura. The following spring we left the island, but even before then we had begun to live there quite openly, bringing ten families of Kirghiz over from the mainland and settling them there, because, you see, I had an idea I might be able to get back some of my old fishing business.

"However, it didn't work. We all came back to the steppe and settled at a village by one of the lakes at the mouth of the Syr Daria, living by trading with the Kirghiz and selling horses into Russia at famine prices. Then in time we moved south to a Cossack village near Auli Ata, Andrusha and Neura still with us. That would be only about a year ago.

"Now I knew from the first that they would not get on together, and they didn't. It made a great change in Neura, living with him. She learned to read and write, and was always pestering to be away in the towns, to Moscow, to see life. And he never listening to her, not caring a rap, but sticking to his horses and his bit of land, making friends among the Kirghiz and trying to forget he ever was an officer and a great man in the old days.

"This annoyed Neura more than anything. For once

she knew that she was beautiful, with power over men, she was all on fire to be off to Moscow and try herself out in the biggest place she knew of. She started to nag him, called him proud and a bourgeois because he took no notice of her, to mock his decent ways (for he kept them always, even among the Kirghiz), and to try to drag him down from what she thought was his high and mighty perch. Then when it had no effect she tried the old game of going off with other men, for there was no lack of lusty Cossack lads in the village, just back from the wars and burning for a chance at her. One day when she was more than usually mad with him, she let out that she was no stranger to some of these boys.

"That settled it. Andrusha has a terrible black sort of temper when he's roused, the sort of temper that goes straight out for violent action—a real Russian, in fact. I'm the same myself, save that I am quicker roused and sooner cooled. When he heard this from Neura he just picked up a whip and went for her. And he didn't stop till they tore him away, for her screams soon brought the neighbours in, you may be sure.

"Now, what do you think that bitch does? Right there before every one, half naked and bleeding, she gets up and demands they give him to the militia. She says she is pregnant, that he might have killed her and his child as well.

"Of course they arrested him, and it all came out about his being an ex-officer, and perhaps a deserter as well, so that things looked pretty black for our Andrusha. In the old days a man might beat his wife and be damned to it, but now it seems we are no longer free, and every village whore has as many rights as the best man that ever stepped.

"It was more than I could stomach, to see Andrusha go away to prison for a year or more, all because of that girl's lying. I knew what she wanted—to go to Moscow. So I gave her the money and told her to clear out. She went,

nor needed telling twice. Well, there was the chief witness gone. Then I went round to the militia, who were none of them Communists, and pleaded with them a little, and drank with them a lot, and maybe left a little something behind by mistake, and in the end they didn't send him to the town for trial, but fined him and let him go.

"You know, I think that in some ways that business proved too much for our boy. He didn't seem to care a damn about her, unless it was for the people she might harm in Moscow, but the arrest and the whole business brought back his old trouble. When he came out of prison again he was full of this 'haunting' business you heard from him last night, and would go apart to brood just as he does now. I'm afraid it spoilt him. He'll never live a really normal life again. Back there in the tent with Ali Hodja's boys you can bet he's listening to tales of famous races, of some horse that made the fortune of its owner, of a Kirghiz wedding feast that beat all others for the magnificence of its hospitality. Horses and girls and eating are all the Kirghiz talk about. Yet he lives with them and seems to prefer it.

"God knows, I'm a civilized man myself and I don't like that sort of thing, but I can't stop him."

He spread his hands out deprecatingly and the hoarse low voice sounded very troubled, as though this were no nice thing to have to confess to two highly cultivated strangers.

Yasha asked him if they had ever heard news of the girl.

"Yes. She had the impudence to write from Moscow. She had got with a band of some sort of singers and said she was doing quite well."

There was a lot John wanted to ask, but it was late and they were tired. Yasha summed it up for him.

"Ilya Fedorich, I think our friend is right when he goes

about saying he's a dead man. Life as that kind of man sees it has gone for ever now. Perhaps you don't think so, but it's true, nevertheless."

"Why, no, I can't say that I agree with you. Our Andrusha's all right, if he weren't so melancholy. But he knows a horse when he sees one, and there's no need for a man like that to say that he has finished with life, out here on the steppe. I think that if he gets over this last trouble he'll be himself again."

"Yes, he will be himself, even if he stays a peasant merchant among the Kirghiz and makes money. But what do you yourself make money for, Ilya Fedorich? Is it just for love of having it?"

"In God's name no! I make it to spend, and what I don't spend I use for educating my children into something better than their father."

"Exactly," said Yasha, "into something better. It's what we call progress, but Andrusha won't have any children."

And they went to sleep in the round tent, among the felts and saddles.

CHAPTER X

At Auli Ata their caravan broke up. Kireiev and Andrusha, with Ali Hodja's sons and wife and household belongings, went away to the north to their own home. Yasha, Ali Hodja and John took train for Tashkent, not in cattle-trucks this time, but on good hard seats in a third-class wagon, like gentlemen. Sad had been the farewells between the travellers, and when John saw Kireiev and Andrusha ride away, with the train of camels and sheep guarded by Ali Hodja's brisk young sons, he felt that part of his life was riding away.

Was it all gone then, the old vagabondage, gone the

Siberian mountains and vast rivers, among which he had wandered with Grisha and Jenny, gone the wide grassy steppes, the lonely marshes and the dark flights of waterfowl, gone the great forests and the snow-clad mountaintops, gone the dry salt plains of sand and clay? All faded away northward as the little caravan disappeared behind a cliff of violet-brown loess sharp cut in the clear autumn air. There was a music in that bright air which sang and echoed and faded as they were lost to sight. John turned back to the station with his companions, ill content. No doubt Tashkent was but a town, like any other, a stepping-stone to Moscow, to London or New York.

Yet when he got to Tashkent he was not ill pleased, though in a few days Yasha was to leave him for Moscow. He made his home in the native city with Ali Hodja, in a cool clay-built house with clean-swept floors and carpet-hung walls. Just what he was going to do there he did not know, but he had no desire to go to Moscow yet, no wish to work. It was winter, Tashkent was comparatively warm, food and amusement plentiful there, and like many another that winter John felt he might be in a much worse place.

The days were gone when mobs of starving peasants came in on every train, shivering in their rags on open trucks, dirty, disease-stricken, like a host of locusts searching for food. The survivors of that terrible exodus had nearly all returned to their desolate homes in the northern steppes about the Volga, to scratch the soil for the autumn sowing and resume their age-long, untiring battle with the earth.

Others had remained, a type of people less desirable, but more lively. These were the scum of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie who had failed to emigrate and with the coming of N.E.P. had sought out Tashkent as a place where all things might be permitted for a while, if only the

Bolsheviks were left alone to get on with their work of consolidating the new Asiatic Republics. And John very quickly found that among certain of these people all was permitted and all was done.

Anxious men and women in leather jackets and wide-peaked caps hurried to and fro from the Revolutionary Military Council to the Tsik, from the Tsik to the Cheka, or dashed off in motor-cars to the station, on the way to Ferghana, to Pishpek, to Samarkand, to wherever the news of some fresh conspiracy or Basmach outrage came from, but the other people, the lively ones, took no notice of them, unless to sneer.

Before leaving, Yasha warned him. "You'll come to no good staying here too long with nothing to do, Vanya. Smoking hashish and drinking champagne is all that half the Russians in this place are any good for. Find out for yourself by all means, if you care to, but I warn you, you'll find something pretty nasty, for there's no vice these people don't rejoice in. As for the natives, you're living with Ali Hodja and it's ten to one he'll be up to his neck in some conspiracy before he's been in Tashkent a week."

"Why?" John asked.

"Well, why has he come here, anyway? He's a Kirghiz. He doesn't live by nature in the towns, though he's as rich as the devil. He married a young wife only a year ago and she isn't here, though he's been away from home for months in Siberia. The very house you're living in really belongs to a notorious Basmach leader, or it did till a very short time ago, and nobody has been able to discover when or how it changed hands."

"I say, Yasha, you seem to know a lot."

"It's my business to know things. Don't say I haven't warned you if any trouble comes. And if you do see any coming clear out quick to Moscow, for I shan't be able to help you."

"All right," John said. "I'll remember. But there's a

lot I still want to see before I settle down. I know you think I'm a vagabond, and I am in some ways, yet I can't help this thirst to see things. When I've seen enough I'll sit down and think about it and make up my mind about the next step."

"Well, mind you don't burn your bottom when you sit down, my lad, that's all." Yasha laughed, and John, who could never fail to be affected by the smiling eyes and the wide mouth, laughed too, but a little ruefully, for it suddenly struck him that Yasha might be right. Maybe, after all, life wasn't made so simply that you could sit down on it to make up your mind about its nature. It might keep burning too fiercely for that. Maybe if you didn't make up your mind as you went along, you would never get the opportunity to do so. He was sorry when Yasha left him for Moscow.

He learned too soon that most of Yasha's warnings were fully justified.

CHAPTER XI

DURING that long ride from Omsk to Tashkent many new things had come to birth in John's mind. He had ridden across the heart of Asia, over grass steppes and sandy wastes, across swift rivers, through wooded valleys overhung by great mountains, and dimly, obscurely, in the tents of nomads, from wayfaring companions, in the mud-houses of the infrequent towns, he had become aware of a tremendous process. Something was waking after a long sleep, and a stirring was going on over the endless steppe such as the stir that precedes the awaking of spring, when in a night the grass shoots up, tall and green, many-coloured tulips flame and dance in the warm breeze, and even on the sandy wastes for a brief day there is a blossom of desert green.

Yasha had told him that for centuries the shape of Cen-

tral Asia had been changing, slowly drying up, the unfertile clay and the drifting sand covering up great cities and flowering plains. Nature had been slowly throttling the Turkish peoples, with a long, untiring grip, driving them south and west and north in search of fertile valleys and green steppes. Now something new was happening, a turn in the battle. Even Ali Hodja had said that one day his people might win back the steppe. When Andrusha had scornfully asked how, he replied simply that he had heard that the Bolsheviks had invented a new weapon called "Electrificatsia," which was performing miracles in Russia.

Other things also John had begun to think of, beauty being one. What was it? One night in Siberia he had heard a nightingale sing over a battlefield, a song of new birth. Had it anything to do with the power which had haunted Andrusha, driving him from woman to woman in search of some wild ultra-human satisfaction? So that when he had failed to find it he was haunted by his failure in the shape of this woman, Natalia Yulevna, while at the same time he sought escape from his haunting in the mysticism he had disclosed to John by the edge of the lake, that autumn night before the great storm.

Before Yasha went away John tried to explain something of this to him. His friend listened kindly and then turned his clear face full on him, that face which would have been like a young saint's from an ikon, but for the eagle nose and the laughing eyes.

"Eh, Vanya, I'm a workman, but I'll tell you something of what I think about you and your thoughts. You take people too seriously. Get down to brass tacks and tell yourself honestly who Andrusha is. What was his father?"

John remembered Andrusha telling them of his father. "He was an officer in a cavalry regiment."

"Yes, and what sort of an officer? He was one of Skobelev's brigands who conquered the Turkomans. But he was too much of a good thing even for them and he had to

resign his commission because of certain things he did among the Turkoman women. He married late and lived with village girls. He belonged to a noble family and was syphilitic. That's your Andrusha's father. If you want to know anything more, he lived to be seventy-five, drank vodka on his death-bed and had half a dozen diseased bastards. That's the origin of our friend's passionate love, that's the basis of his mysticism. Oh yes, he's dead as far as Russia's concerned. He's quite right there—he's dead with all his rotten kind."

"Well, Yasha, what about yourself? Doesn't love mean anything to you? You have a wife."

"Yes, and I may have another before I die. And she may have a dozen husbands. But that's not life. I love my wife all right, yet I can think of many a moment in the last four years when I lived a thousand times more briskly than ever in her arms. And I dare say she could say the same of me."

"But what's your idea of life?"

"To make things go. To waken the world. There's these deserts to reclaim, all Russia to be covered with rail- and air-routes, factories to build, new things to be discovered, to make men freer. Oh yes, I like to make things go, to turn a wheel and make something move. To plan the production of a new commodity; all that's a thousand times better than the love of any woman. That's life for you. Bread, transport, the first necessities of life, those are what have been most in our minds these last five years. Now we can begin to think of something more than that, and every year we shall go on thinking of something more. This is a country where everything is possible, where everything can be tried. And, in fact, we are going to try everything."

"I guess you're right," said John, recalling that Pete was such a one, that he had never cared a damn about women, or beauty, or truth, or any of the things that filled the

books they had given him at school, or that the school teachers were always talking about. Pete had just wanted freedom to do things.

"Of course I'm right. Shall I tell you about one of the best moments of my life, Vanya? It was making a train go at a Siberian station one night in 1920. I was in charge of that train, which was taking food and machine parts to the workers in a factory at the end of a long branch line. I got the train as far as the junction, but there we stuck. The stationmaster was a real bourgeois, a big fellow in a white tunic with brass buttons, polite as the devil, and determined to hang us up as long as he could. He had no engine. It was impossible for us to proceed. You see we were only part of a longer train, and the engine which had brought us was forced to go on. I brought out my revolver and gave him five minutes to think of how to find an engine. He cursed, he prayed, but in four minutes he remembered that there were three engines in the sheds, and that all of them were disabled. I took him into the sheds and being a railwayman I pretty soon saw that one of them had not been disabled by any accident. So I gave him another minute to tell me what had happened to the engine. He thought I was bluffing. I wasn't, and at the end of the minutes that nice white tunic of his was spoiled and they were carrying him out of the shed. The assistant stationmaster then told me all I wanted to know. He brought me the parts which had been taken from the locomotive and hidden and I set to work to repair that engine. They had made a pretty mess of her, but with the help of some fitters we had roused up from the cottages, and by working all night through, we made her move before dawn. I have never felt happier in my life than at the moment we got steam up, and I blew her whistle as loudly as ever I could, hoping it would echo across the steppe to the comrades in the factory.

"I blew the whistle all the time as we came out of the sheds, and backed on to the cars. The people in the town thought it was an alarm and came out to see. But all they saw was the stationmaster's body in the waiting-room, and me playing his funeral march on the whistle as I took the train out of the station on to the branch line. That was life, Vanya, my boy, making something move, bringing bread to the workers, giving them a chance to win the Revolution in their factory."

And John was satisfied. That was life, life as Pete would have understood it, life as it was not understood by parsons, schoolmasters, shopkeepers, writers of novels and anarchists in the United States of America.

CHAPTER XII

LEFT alone with Ali Hodja, John grew to like the old man more and more, a feeling which was warmly returned. He talked to John of horses, of racing and hunting, of rich "Bais" and beautiful girls among his own people, told him stories of vanished Khans and warriors, sang him songs and poured out to him all the rich life of the nomad Turk.

He was so thick-set and sturdy, the white teeth flashed so amiably beneath the sparse moustache, that in spite of his host's many faults John could not yet bring himself to leave Tashkent. For Ali Hodja was far from faultless; he loved to boast of his herds, his horses, his wives, and his prowess with herds, horses and women alike. For all his Muhammadan faith he drank freely of the sweet wines of Turkestan and invited dancing-girls to his house—and on occasion, dancing-boys, Batchas, who dressed like women and danced lasciviously before Ali Hodja and his friends. Then from time to time he had an access of religious fer-

vour, said all his prayers regularly throughout the day, conversed with Mullahs and inveighed against the atheism of the Bolsheviks.

Once or twice John asked him why he did it all—what pleasure he found in the dancing-boys, what point there was in the religion whose tenets he broke almost hourly. But Ali Hodja laughed at him.

"Am I not the equal of a Christian since the Revolution? Is it only a Mussulman who is expected to observe every letter of his faith? But listen, my dear soul, I am not a religious man, it is true, yet Islam is the faith of my fathers, and today the house of my fathers is being threatened. As for the Batchas, well, my wives are far away, and from the dancing-girls I can get nothing but syphilis. Listen, my heart, I have a tale to tell you," and he proceeded to tell John a tale that made him hold his sides with laughter.

Yet the dancing-girls soon came oftener and the Batchas less frequently. And in time Ali Hodja confided to John that he too had got syphilis. "But what would you, my soul? It is the fate of our race when we desert the steppe for the towns, which are verily the home of all evil."

Before long John noticed also that his friend began to have much business to transact in private with Mullahs and other individuals, who came for the most part secretly by night.

Ali Hodja was one of the richest Bais in Turkestan. His own Kirghiz tribe pastured in the valleys around Auli Ata, but he had been a merchant in the great towns and married for his first wife a Tadjik woman from Samarkand, who brought him a property in the hills outside the city. One morning he announced his intention of visiting his property. John suspected there was something else behind the plan and remembered Yasha's warning. But the very next day he was given a reason that allayed his doubts.

"Listen, my two eyes, I am going to Samarkand to

marry a young Uzbeg maiden. I have spoken with our doctor and he tells me that I may cure my evil sickness by lying with a young virgin. There is such a one in Samarkand, the daughter of my friend, Kerim Bai. The wedding is arranged and you shall be present, my dear."

John accepted, and within two days they were in Samarkand. Here he found a very different life from the free existence of the nomad Kirghiz. Kerim Bai's house was a large one, but half of it was sealed to all other men but himself, the half within which the veiled women moved mysteriously and prepared the bride for the wedding.

On the second day he learned from the two old men that she was a far from willing bride. Her name was Hanim Djané and from somewhere she appeared to have received modern ideas that made her revolt against both family and religion. She spent her days in weeping and swore that though the Mullah recited the whole Koran, she should never give herself willingly to an old man whom she did not know.

Willingly or not, within a week Ali Hodja made her his fourth wife and they departed to the village in the hills some thirty miles from Samarkand, where his property lay, taking John with them.

Ali Hodja was no longer the man he had been in the caravan, or even at Tashkent. Trouble with his girl wife made him preoccupied and sad, and John, who now spoke Uzbegi well enough, picked up whispers in the village sufficient to learn that there were also other matters troubling him. For the war in the mountains was not over, though one by one the Basmach chieftains were being overcome. Enver Pasha had died in battle a few months previously, but there were still men left able to keep the field against the Soviet Power, aided by British arms and munitions. It was whispered too that Ali Hodja's lands at Ak Su were in danger of confiscation, the fat pastures, the vineyards and the orchards. As many of the villagers were sure to

benefit by this measure, opinion among them was divided, and in argument the division always seemed to centre around the vexed question of Hanim Djané, one side taking her part and blaming her husband for a rich old tyrant, the other calling her an atheist, a kafir, a loose woman.

John saw little of her, for here in the heart of Turkestan his host put aside his free nomad ways, isolated his wife and her servants and spoke little of her. One evening, however, as they were riding home together towards the village, Ali Hodja opened his heart a little to John.

"Look you, my dear, is not this country fair, and are not my possessions goodly to see?"

And indeed it was so. The little white village on the hill-top, flushed with red from the dying sun, the vineyards, the fields that stretched below them, and in the distance the mountains, snow-capped and grand, it was a sight which John loved.

"And they talk of taking it from me. Not this alone, for that I could bear, but in time my herds and my horses that are far away on the steppe. How then shall I feed my wives? How shall I marry my daughters or find wives for my tall young sons? Ai, my wives. Take no woman for your bed in marriage, my soul, lest she poison your being. I have a wife, a fair young girl, whom I would love as hotly as I might, but she hates me. She has not cured my sickness and she has turned my bed into a battle-ground. Ai, my soul! And Allah knows I am merciful and have forborne to chastise her. I am old and I am sick, and life is becoming as dirt to me."

Indeed he was growing thin and querulous, very changed from the cheerful epicure of Tashkent, or the gay companion of the caravan route. John could feel the tragedy closing in around him. Ali Hodja spent most of his time in the women's rooms and there, behind that inviolable screen, events marched swiftly, which the outsider might

not penetrate, for now not even to his closest friend did the old man talk about his wife.

One morning when John and he rode into their yard they saw a white stallion tied to one of the posts of the verandah. Ali Hodja looked at John anxiously, as though about to speak, but checked himself and said nothing. He went straight in, vanishing again behind the inviolable door, but this time another man was with him and John heard the murmur of their voices.

From the villagers he soon learnt who was their visitor. He was Hazret Bek, the Basmach leader. The villagers told John that he had doubtless ridden in to call out Ali Hodja to his side, for the two were old friends and Hazret Bek was sorely pressed just now.

In the evening he went back to the house, still to find no sign of his host. Behind the door to the women's rooms was absolute silence, but Yussuf, the servant boy, had news for him. In fact, in and around the house there were a dozen waiting to tell him the tale.

A terrible thing had happened—Hanim Djané had insulted Hazret Bek, the guest of her husband, called him a horse thief and a brigand, a ravisher of maidens, a criminal from the jails. And Ali Hodja had lost his patience and beaten his wife soundly. She, smarting from the whip, had sworn she would send word to the town and get the help of the militia, that women in the Soviet Republic were now the equals of men, and no longer to be treated like cattle. She had stormed at her husband till he had fled, calling him a diseased old debaucher, a robber of the poor, and one who cared nought for a woman's honour. He had been so taken aback at her outburst, he had not dared lift his hand again, but locking her in had ridden off to the Mullahs with Hazret Bek.

When Ali Hodja came in that night he was very serious. "Jan, my two eyes, thou must leave me now, I go on a long journey whither none may follow."

"Indeed I have no will to do so, my father," John replied. "Your fate is your own, and if go you must, I can say nothing, yet it is folly, for Hazret Bek is in the wrong, and in his company you will win only sorrow and maybe death."

"It is true," said Ali Hodja, "but I am a Turk. I will strike one blow before I die and it shall be a good one. Shall I give up the heritage of my fathers and the law of Allah for the naked scoundrels of the cities? I have made up my mind and I go. I am an unhappy man, my dear soul."

He left that same night and the following morning John set out for Samarkand, suddenly tired of Asia, and his face turned to the north.

In Tashkent again he heard from his Uzbegi friends the end of Ali Hodja. Two weeks after he had ridden out of his house in the night, he returned at dawn, wounded, hard pressed, and with less than a dozen followers. He had come back to sell his life on his own soil, and this he did, fighting valiantly to the end. But strangest of all, they related that Hanim Djané, his young wife, took a rifle and fought by his side, and that their bodies were found together.

John pondered long over the fate of his friend. Asia. An old and diseased man fighting to the death for his great possessions, for his faith, that all his life he had ignored, for his right to command, and by his side had fought a girl whom he had bought and tainted and who had rebelled against all he stood for with her whole soul. Why? Asia. An Asia that was disappearing for ever before the urge of a new world that only the healthy and the free could inhabit.

Then in the spring, when the rills were running clear through the streets with melted snow from the mountains, and the fruit trees were blossoming, John met Mrs. Pennifold. With that meeting his own life began.

BOOK TWO: THE NEW LAND

Part One

BLACK EARTH

CHAPTER I

THE Moscow train headed steadily north across the sandy steppe, through the white, unstable dunes billowing on either side like the parting of the waters in the Red Sea, over the purple-brown wastes of clay and between sharp escarpments that were like the shores of a forlorn and dried-up ocean. It was a proud, new train, with a stumpy six-wheeled restaurant-car, and lit by electric light. At night the nomads from their beehive tents would watch it pass in a swift glitter, a trail of sparks flying off from the engine into the blue spring night, to fade before the steady gaze of the stars.

Not so had trains passed a few months before. They had gone by in darkness, heavily panting, armed men on the steps of the steel cars. They had come from a land of strife and pillage to make their difficult way into a land of dirt and sorrow. Now in the south the caravans wound safely over the mountain passes into Afghanistan and China and there was no more strife among the Turkish peoples. While in the north, the black steppe between the Ural and the Volga was green again with young corn, and the smoke curled into the sky from the thatched Isbas of the peasants. And the nomads knew this, so that in their tents songs were sung at night around the fires which had not been heard since the bloody tempest of Cossacks rolled over them in 1916.

At noon the train stopped in the station of Kazalinsk, where the tall water-tower is decorated in Eastern fancy to contrast with the monotonous neatness of the railwaymen's

cottages. All around was the steppe, and near by the broad Syr Daria running full between its low unshaded banks. John sat opposite Faith Pennifold and Nancy Briggs and yawned unhappily. To be travelling in a comfortable coupé was one thing, but to sit and amuse these Anglo-Saxon women was another.

Farther up the car strong voices were singing. It was a rhythmic splendid chant and the English woman and the American woman looked to him for explanation, as always they turned to him to explain anything new, or strange, or beautiful, so that they might remodel it nearer to their Anglo-Saxon hearts, and thus have everything clear before them, as decently arranged as an Anglo-Saxon drawing-room.

"They are Communists singing," John explained. "They have been two years in Turkestan on special duty and are going home now to Moscow."

"What are they singing?" asked Miss Briggs nasally, hoping it might be something she could laugh at indulgently and write home about to her friends in Philadelphia.

"They have fine voices," said Mrs. Pennifold, who already knew some verses of Stenka Razin and Dubinushka, and was an authority on folk-music.

"The Builders," John answered.

And the song went on, rhythmic, strong and rising above the chatter that floated up from the chafferers of bread and melons and the hot-water seekers outside on the line.

> "We are the builders; we build the future.
> The future world is in our hands.
> We swing our hammers, we use our weapons,
> Against our foes in every land."

The Communists sang in their coupé while they were preparing to eat. There were six of them sitting together, five men and a red-kerchiefed woman. They had a small

joint of Tashkent mutton, which the woman was cutting into slices on her knee. One of the men had a bottle of red wine which he was pouring into cups on the little table by the window, and they had fruit too, apples, grapes, and peaches from the orchards of the south. The leader of the singing was lying full length on an upper berth which had not been let down. He was covered with blankets, his face was wrinkled, yellow and dry, and under the blankets he shivered, for he had malaria, but it was always he who led the singing, song after song, chants of battle and victory, the songs of faithful soldiers, such songs as had not been heard in the world since the mighty psalms of Cromwell's Ironsides.

"We are the workers; we build the future,
And he who hinders us must fall,
Come join us, comrades, our task is mighty.
We need your help, you workers all."

It was spring and the sun smiled kindly at the young world. Mrs. Pennifold was critical but charitable.

"These people," she declared, "certainly have energy. But they are mistaken if they think that they can build on purely material values."

Miss Briggs, who was nothing if not decided in the comments she sent home to Philadelphia, agreed. "Energetic, Faith dear, but wasteful and untidy. There are so few Russians one can trust in the same way as one trusts an American or an English gentleman. Communists are not better than the rest."

"Violence and suppression of freedom are not true foundations for a new society. Yet they certainly do get some things done. I beg your pardon, John?"

"Nothing," said John, and he pricked the spluttering primus on which was cooking their lunch of reliable canned food.

John had met Mrs. Pennifold by accident in the bazaar at Tashkent. His money was running short, he had nowhere to go and had seized on her as a great opportunity for being taken north, an opportunity to follow Yasha and get put on the rails once more. For the death of Ali Hodja had depressed him, and he wanted to be back again with some one who saw clearly and was not afraid.

He saw the two ladies in obvious difficulties over the purchase of a silver coffeepot. Nancy Briggs, small, thin, wrinkled, with grey bobbed hair, in thick grey tweeds, was holding the pot in one hand and menacing the Sart merchant with the other. Mrs. Pennifold, young, well-built and untidy, was arguing on the other side of the merchant in half-intelligible Russian. A crowd was gathering. A rapid and pointed commentary on the Anglo-Saxon women was passing from mouth to mouth in guttural, musical Uzbegi, which, if they had understood, would have caused them to blush uncomfortably over all those unseen parts bandied from mouth to mouth of the lewd spectators.

John discovered the difficulty after listening for a moment. The two ladies had a fixed Anglo-Saxon method of bargaining based on the rule that every bazaar merchant is a rogue and that the true price of any article was from one quarter to one-third of what was demanded. Like many another Anglo-Saxon generalization, that is sometimes true, but in this case they had made a mistake. The pot was really valuable and the merchant, who had received them with great politeness (they had not understood this), was irritated by their foolish insistence on offering him something under half its value. The ladies refused to give up, having been assured by many friends that this sort of thing was all part of a long game and that it was only necessary to hold out and the roguish merchant would give way.

It took John quite a time to explain their mistake to them. He winked at the merchant and impressed on them

that the pot was really being offered at something much below its real value. The ladies were sure that any one speaking English so well must be honest and at once paid the price John told them it was worth. The merchant beamed, complimented them on their generosity and beauty, contrived unseen to slip a small commission into John's hand, and all ended happily. The good-humoured crowd dispersed with much raillery of John, which he returned with interest, and Mrs. Pennifold was convinced that she had made a wonderful discovery.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, who would have been very attractive save for an untidy protuberance in every respect. Her rich figure was slightly over-developed. Her lips were a shade too thick, her cheeks too red, her blue eyes a little too prominent. Her manner was commanding, her ignorance and dislike of men immense. But John was so boyishly beautiful, the story he told to the two trusting ladies was so pathetic, that she took him to her heart immediately and with that masculine assertiveness and feminine desire of possession, which marked her so strongly, before the day was out had come to consider him her private property.

Doctor Nancy Briggs was more doubtful, but she could not resist Faith's enthusiasm, and it was decided between them that John should become their guide and interpreter in Tashkent and afterwards go back with them to the Quaker Mission in Samara Province.

John looked at the two women who had adopted him, and for all his youth felt like an indulgent father listening to the first prattle on life of ignorant children. He even felt slightly ashamed of them. Had he known more about England all Mrs. Pennifold's life would have been an open book to him, from the day she first told him that she had been separated from her husband in India, "because they couldn't agree on certain matters." He would have seen the Quaker school, with its continual suppressions, the

ignorant girl marrying the "gentleman," the gentleman's inability to understand any of her desires, her wish for creative work, and finally the disgust for sex.

But John knew nothing of England, so he only thought of Mrs. Pennifold and Miss Briggs as two narrow old maids, who had missed all the joy of life. And when in the train at the wayside station on the sandy steppe Mrs. Pennifold, listening to the singing Communists, had made her observation on the foundations of society, John had also made an observation, strong, short, and masculine, but happily the roar of the primus, on which he was heating the reliable American canned beans, had drowned it. In any case it is doubtful if the Anglo-Saxon ladies would have understood his expletive.

The train started again. Lying full length on an upper berth in an adjacent coupé, covered with blankets, lay a man shivering with fever. But he was singing, strongly, youthfully:

> "We are the workers; we build the future,
> And he who hinders us must fall."

The singing faded in the noise of the train gathering speed. Day passed, and the night came on, encompassing the proud, new train, lit by electric light. From the shelter of their beehive tents the nomads watched it pass in a swift glitter, saw the trail of sparks flying off from the engine into the spring night, to fade before the gaze of the stars, and were content.

CHAPTER II

THE Quakers' House in Buzuluk had been the residence of the richest man in the town, a wheat millionaire who was now a shopkeeper in Samara. It was of

brick, stuccoed, long and two-storied, an archway in the centre leading through to the wide untidy yard and outbuildings. The Quakers kept it like a very tidy barracks, and remains of ancient grandeur, such as stupidly smiling painted cupids, still looked down on trestle tables, spotlessly clean, and cheap American chairs.

The Russian staff of chauffeurs and interpreters was housed in a big dormitory, which was neither cosy like the little rooms of the leading Quakers, nor tidy as a hospital ward like the small dormitories of the minor Quakers. It was gloriously untidy, full of a warm and sprawling humanity, mostly returned emigrants from Canada and the States, who stole, quarrelled, and swore with unchanging good humour. John was quite happy with these workers, mostly men too lazy for the Party or the workshop, or men who wanted a rest after the unhuman mechanical toil of an American factory.

In the mission dining-room there were two tables. At one sat all the Quaker women and most of the men, at the other sat the Russians with two or three Englishmen more nearly working-class by origin than most of the mission. As often as he could without appearing unmannerly to the ladies at the other table, there also sat a thin young English student, who with evident relief plunged into the gaiety of the workers' table. His name was Peter Jebb, and John rather liked his appearance. He was so young and innocent looking, with wavy brown hair and candid grey eyes, and he enjoyed so naïvely every bawdy joke or rough humour of the men at the table. He had a few good jokes himself, but they were evidently a carefully hoarded store, added to with some difficulty. When he swore the coarse words seemed meaningless, like caresses, or the laughter of a child.

John did not feel very happy in Buzuluk. Out of the talk of the Russian workmen there came the reek of Amer-

ican cities, of Detroit and Philadelphia, of Eastern mines and Middle-Western factories. It was his own atmosphere and it caught him by the throat, forced itself on him, so that within a week he drank with them, played poker with them, and pursued girls with them as avidly as though he had never left California. There was no man among them like Pete Mason, who could force mere brutishness into giant strength and so fashion his life to an epic of immense grandeur. In the mission they were bent on escaping hard work, or service in the army, and they were a cheerful, loafing, grousing crowd, good followers and poor leaders. If John had stayed with them a month they would have won him for themselves, since they all liked him. Only a lucky accident prevented this.

John worked with Peter Jebb and Mrs. Pennifold at the organization of soup kitchens for children in the town. A big lazy Pole called Walter occasionally helped them and it was through Peter's innocence and Walter's experience that John met Nadya. A young girl who was teaching in one of the schools fell in love with Peter and much to his mingled pleasure and dismay told him so very emphatically. Peter, who could hardly speak two words of Russian, did not know what to do, but through John the girl arranged an appointment with him in the town garden for that evening.

"Look here," said Peter, as dismayed as he was pleased. "What on earth am I to do?"

"Why go, of course," John answered.

"But how can I talk to her?"

"Why should you talk to her?"

"Oh, that sounds all right, but it's not possible to get anywhere if we can't understand a word of what we're saying to one another."

Peter was certainly a virgin, and so very shy that John felt that he would be in danger of remaining one for ever,

if he were not assisted along the path of true love. John understood well enough that even for a sordid little flirtation of this kind Peter would have to dress everything in the fresh colours of a country idyll. It would certainly be better for him if he could not understand the girl, or the idyll would quickly fade. So when pressed to come as interpreter, John at first refused. Peter pleaded and in the end John yielded to him unwillingly. He managed, without very much difficulty, to make Peter an hour late for his rendezvous. It was a beautiful July evening, still warm and throbbing with the splendour of the day. The music of the string band floated through the air as hushed and gloriously happy as the playing of mummers outside a bridal chamber. Lights hung from the trees. In the intervals of music the throng of young people, linked arm in arm, walked slowly round the band-stand in procession, laughing and talking as they went. Here and there couples made off into the quiet solitude where the garden overhung the broad shallow river. Of Peter's light o' love there was no sign, until, wandering through the garden, they saw her in her white dress sitting on a bench, clasped in the strong arms of lazy Walter. Peter blushed and turned away without speaking, unseen by the lovers, and John laughed gently, glad that his friend had not been made a bigger fool of than this.

In a short time Peter went home, since he was too shy to try his broken Russian on any of the girls in the park, and moreover was unable to dance. But John remained. He felt a lightness in his feet and a joy in his heart that must find expression. The band was tuning up again. A dance began, and he suddenly found himself face to face with a young girl.

They danced together, again and again, hardly speaking, but he noted she was fair, with ruddy-brown cheeks and eyes like forest pools, her bare legs were tanned and

straight, her young body sturdy and her lifted face stirred him so that his heart beat strangely fast and the blood mounted to his head. Her fair hair was bound in a red scarf, and she smiled as she danced, showing strong perfect teeth in her laughing mouth with its firm and loving lips.

Nadya was her name. And he was Vanya. The dancing ended. The band played the Varsavianka and then the International, the crowd dispersed, but still they were there in the garden, sitting above the river bank, listening to the murmur of the water beneath, and speaking never a word. John's mind had gone back to a summer evening in a pine forest a year ago, to the bitter smell of blood and the passionate singing of a bird. That night something had awakened in his mind that he had not understood. It was this.

Then at last they began to talk to one another, slowly and with difficulty, in whispers as light as the warm breezes that played in the thick bushes around them.

What they said is of no consequence, since the words of young people in love vary hardly at all. But what they felt mattered immensely to both. As she lay beside him the consciousness of her was acute in John, and the deep life in her stirred him strangely. Here was something he had never experienced before in his wild, wandering existence, the deep life of another human being stirring him and speaking to him, through rich lips that breathed tenderness, through eyes that were lit with a fire such as he had never seen, through all the warmth of blood in her fine and eager body. The newness of it struck him like a sudden blow that awakens fresh fields of consciousness.

In the half light of that summer evening the figure of John, dark, tall and vigorous, had appeared so vividly to Nadya that she felt she knew him already, that a picture of him which had always lain in her mind had suddenly and remarkably come to life before her. A trick of con-

sciousness, that is all. When it happens to young lovers they are used to say, "When I saw you I thought I had known you always, that you were no stranger." Nadya, who was still only a girl, said to herself that this was love at first sight, and never realized that it was the quick imagination of youth and the beauty of a summer evening combined.

After the first swift words of love they lay still a long time, not speaking, content to feel each other's presence.

John stirred first. "Where do you live? What do you do?"

"I am a teacher, and I live in the Children's Home called after the Paris Commune. But that's only an accident, for really I am a factory girl in Moscow."

"How do you come to this God-forsaken spot, then?"

"My father came here in 1920 to find his family, and thinking to live more easily than in Moscow. He came for bread and found famine. He died of typhus at Christmas."

"Are you going to stay here?"

"Never. As soon as I can I am going to Moscow, back to the factory. But what are you? You must be with the Quakers?"

"Yes, for a time. I have come from Vladivostok and I am working up to Moscow. Perhaps we can go together?"

"Of course. We'll go in the autumn. They say there's plenty of work now in the factories for skilled workers, and I know my job; I've worked since I was twelve. But I shan't be able to see you much after this week, Vanya, I don't see how I can."

"Why not? You must."

"Because in a few days they are sending me to Pavlovka village, fifty versts from here, to teach in the Children's Home there and to be instructor to the Young Communists. That will be for two months at least."

"Then I'll come as well. The Quakers won't keep me here unless I choose."

He kissed her warmly, with all his youth, and pressed her closer, so that the red scarf came undone and her fair hair fell about his cheek. They fell asleep together and awoke in the summer dawn.

Below, at the bottom of the brown-black cliff, ran the river over its wide and sandy bed. The farther bank was low and green, the plain stretched out to the ridge of bare hills, at whose foot the red monastery nestled in a copse of trees. John and Nadya awoke with their eyes on these hills to the south, where the wild downs commenced to roll towards the Asian steppe. The song of the river was clean and swift, white birds flashed above; and they were glad with a newborn joy as they scrambled down the steep bank, doffed their clothes and rolled in the cool, shallow water together, laughing and singing at the summer dawn.

CHAPTER III

Love is a breathless excitement when first it comes, and somehow John managed to see Nadya for a part of every day until the week came to an end and she left for the village. One night Peter came across them sitting together on an iron drainage hatch that rose like the turret of a battleship in the middle of the road near the Quaker House. He was too polite to say anything and hurried by with a curious glance at the two lovers.

What those two were thinking of he could not imagine, for he had never been in love, or, rather, he had often been in love, but never up to the point of expression. He had not the remotest notion what two young people, seated together at night on an iron hatch in the middle of the

road, might be saying to one another. In fact, what held them so fascinated, what made them so spellbound that the blue world of night went round them in a dance, was the discovery of one another.

Night after night, in meetings such as this, John grew to know Nadya, her swift vigour, the warm-hearted passion that flowed in her blood, her humour, mocking and direct, and her friendliness. This last was the quality in her that made her so different from any other girl he had ever known. The girls in the American city were of another race, with codes and manners that gave them the air of a hostile tribe, so that when one spoke to them it was with the uncertainty of a soldier from an enemy army, ready to fraternize for a few moments during a quiet spell in battle. Or else they were mere experimenters in the physical, or birds of prey as Murphy's girl had been, wanting him for their own ends. Not so Nadya. She was a comrade first and he had no reservations with her, no feeling that she was just playing during a brief armistice, and that at the back of her friendliness lay a host of unknown things which might at any moment become sharp weapons directed against him. She was his friend, she said so. She was his lover, she claimed it proudly, and between them there was a bond. No wonder a new world began to grow for him. The reek of American slums no longer threatened him. Instead, he found in himself things he had never imagined to be there, strength and directness of aim, knowledge and sureness of life. For the first time he could imagine a world through which he guided himself, a world full of adventure, where the absence of Pete Mason made no difference, since he could see his own way.

And Nadya felt the change in him, felt the coming of a new life in him as well as in herself.

"When I first met you, Vanya, only a few days ago,

although I loved you I didn't know what you were. I thought you were a kind of vagabond and that you might wander off at any moment."

"And now?"

"Now you're not so bad. There's still something funny in you, but at least I know you are strong and can do things if you want to."

"What's funny in me?"

"Oh, it's hard to explain. But I keep feeling you have a kind of dark side, that you might go right off the deep end without warning, take to drink, become a thief, I don't know. Anyway, you're a little scoundrel, and I love you."

John laughed. "So I am, and a vagabond, too. Up to now I have never known what there was in life to excite one, beyond just wandering, except, maybe, what I've seen in other people, in just two or three people. But I've never discovered for myself. Now I guess I'm beginning to."

"And what are you finding?"

"Ah! That's what I can't just tell. You see, mine's been a funny life. But in spite of that I've always been terribly curious, terribly interested. Only I just haven't found what's at the back of things."

"And now you have?"

"Not a bit of it. I just begin to feel that I can find out, that's all."

So sometimes they talked. Other times they sat in silence, as lovers do, drinking in delight of one another.

Nadya was but a few months older than John. Yet her life for five years, at least, had been part of an organized force, an immense irresistible force, that had overthrown a system and was trying to build a new life. She was flesh and blood of those who saw a way through the tragic jungle of existence, and cut and hewed that way remorselessly, till it should lead them out into the wide open. That had been bred in her, that pioneer way of thought, from

very childhood. In John she thought she felt tremendous strength, the power of doing and thinking, only it was deep down, half lost in a wild tangle, and she was afraid of his strength.

But Nadya was above all brave. When you saw her walking down the street, noted the swing of her young body, the ruddy-brown cheeks with the great lively eyes, the straight young legs bare and brown, the first thing that struck you was that here was a girl whom you wouldn't easily frighten.

So, though she was afraid of all she felt to be latent in John's wild youthfulness, she never gave way for five minutes to that fear. She had only one thought, one desire, to bring him on the same path as herself, to prevent that strength of his going off madly into sheer uncontrolled violence. She knew what that strength could do if he would apply it in the way she wanted. John knew also, from his friendships with Pete Mason and Yasha, yet he knew that he would have to push himself on to the right path out of his own volition. No one else could do it. And this Nadya also realized. She loved him and she was a friend, but she never tried to drag him along with her.

Nevertheless, the occasions when John himself began to glimpse the possibilities of life became more frequent. For now he had her, and his constant thought was what they might make of life, together. He was growing, he was awakening.

The morning after he had seen them on the hatch, Peter Jebb talked to John of Nadya. John did not speak much, seemed even moodily silent, but at last burst out with, "Peter, wouldn't you like to go to the village for a change?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because I want to go. Nadya is going to Pavlovka tomorrow and I must go also. I hear that Hatfield is

going home and Miss Wright at Pavlovka has malaria. Can't you manage to persuade Mrs. Pennifold that it would be a good thing if we all went out to take their places?"

"Yes, it might be done. Anyhow, I am sick of soup kitchens. I'll talk to Faith about it, and see what she says."

"Well, then, see that she says 'yes.'"

That night there was a dance given by the Rabfak students, and many of the young English folk from the mission, with some of their Russian acquaintances, were present. John was dancing with Nadya. Round and round they danced together, he dark and tall, supple as a young willow, she fair and nobly built, free as a white ship upon the sea. Others were there, young students, loose-bloused and sunburned, girls fair and dark, plump and slender, but in the centre of all John and Nadya. As they danced the others followed them, circled round, and passing them, smiled and felt a swifter fire run through their young limbs.

CHAPTER IV

NADYA went to Pavlovka next morning. She sat at the back of the tarantass, propped against a sack containing her books and clothes. With her was Frumkin, from the county Ispolkom. He was delegate for Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, and whenever he went into the village carried a Japanese rifle, and a revolver strapped round his waist. He was short and hairy, a peasant himself, with a peasant's mild blue eyes. Nadya chaffed him on his armament.

"Ah, Nadezhda Semionovna, you children can laugh, but last year during the famine I needed them. And there are still plenty of bad characters around who wouldn't think twice of a chance to do in a Communist. There was

that mutiny in the regiment from Samara, only six months ago, and we didn't round up all that crowd. Besides, a pot at a bit of game is good for the soul now and then."

Frumkin really carried the weapons to impress the peasants with his authority.

"Ekh," they used to say, "here's old Frumkin that the gendarmes were always chasing in the old days. Now he carries a rifle and revolver just like a gendarme himself. It's a wonderful change, a wonderful change."

It was a bright June day, hot, with a blue sky more wide and smiling than the steppe itself. The miles of corn that ran in great waves on either side of the road, rustling mysteriously like the sea, were just turning from green to gold. In another month it would be harvest-time. Islands of green pasture, with little copses of silver birch, rivers between high clay banks, the bridges freshly repaired after the spring floods, broke the soft monotony of the sea of waving corn.

It was a summer day, and Nadya lay contentedly in the bottom of the jolting cart, glad to let the sun caress her, but Frumkin wore an old sheepskin and the end of his long nose was red, with a drop on it that shone like a pearl in the sun, as though it had been nipped by the winter cold. He sat straight up and looked about him over the rich earth, full of generous satisfaction at the splendid promise of the harvest, calling out rough greetings and questions to the labouring peasants when they came within reach of his voice.

Nadya was thinking of a boy with a body like a young god's, of kisses and words of love exchanged in the heart of the summer night. She stirred lazily.

"Frumkin, would you marry an American?"

Frumkin looked down at her in amazement, so that the pearly drop on the end of his nose shook as though about to fall. "Marry an American? What should I want to

marry an American for? You Komsomols are always thinking of sex, or some such nonsense. An American, indeed! Besides, I'm married already and have got six children."

"Well," said Nadya, "people do marry. If you were a girl like me you might want to marry. Just suppose you weren't married, would you marry an American?"

"Would I, hell! That woman Briggs, for example, who always looks as though she ought to be smoking a clay pipe! No, thank you. I don't like Americans and they don't like me. A pack of interfering bourgeois, that's all!"

"How do you know they don't like you?"

"Why, didn't they kick up a dust because I was elected head of the Health Department last year? Went to the President of the Ispolkom, they did, and said, 'Mr. Panimarov, we don't think Mr. Frumkin is a suitable man to take on the Health Department. You see,' they said, 'he's not a very well-educated man, and he isn't a doctor.' And then they had the impudence to propose that blasted old counter-revolutionary Pavlov in my place, because, if you please, he's a doctor and speaks German. Panimarov spoke to them as nice as could be and explained to them that Russia isn't America, and that when a man is elected by the people to do a job he can't very well be turned out because certain foreigners object to him. He told me he was near knocking their blocks off and chucking 'em in their faces. But trust him to speak nice and gently, all the same. No, you can keep your Americans and your Quakers and boil 'em in oil to feed the pigs with."

"Yes," persisted Nadya, very softly, "but I wasn't thinking of a Quaker. Would you marry an American worker?"

"I don't believe there are any. And if there are they can't be worth much to put up with such a lousy lot of bourgeois."

"Well, suppose it was an American worker who was nearly a Russian?"

"Ugh! Worse than ever! Look at that crowd the Quakers have got with them, chauffeurs and what not. They come sniffing round at us as though they knew everything in the world because they've been in America, and they're a lazy lot of bastards. Where were they when we made the Revolution? What are they doing now? Filling their bellies on the Quakers; lazing their time away when they might be showing us a thing or two about America that *is* worth knowing, by working in the factory. How many of them's in the Party? They've all got a grouse of some kind, because they don't live in palaces and have motor-cars. Nothing better than a lot of anarchists. No, try again!"

"Well, but I'm thinking of marrying an American."

"What!" He stared down at her with incredulous, watery blue eyes, the ragged moustache bristling with amazement. "No. Not you, Nadya. Why, you're a real good girl, a hard worker, and one day you might— No, it can't be. You're pulling my leg."

"An American," she said again, enjoying his confusion.

"Now, what the hell for? Aren't you the bonniest girl in all Buzuluk? Isn't there a decent Russian lad good enough for you?"

"You don't know him. He isn't the sort you've met."

"But is he in the League or the Party? What is he?"

"No, he's in neither. He's just a stray—left here a year ago by some Russians returning from America, and he's wandered to Buzuluk. He'll join the League, though, once he settles. Ah, you don't know him, Frumkin, but he's after your own heart. He has seen so much, and knows so much, and he'll be a good Communist one day, never fear."

Frumkin would not be consoled, but he liked Nadya, so in this he consented to think of the American with some-

thing that was not absolute distaste. "We'll have a look at him and see what he's good for," was as far as he would commit himself before they arrived at Pavlovka.

The village Ispolkom had arranged for Nadya to lodge at the priest's house. He was a man well known in the district, a clean, modern priest, a thin, small man, with a short clipped beard and deep brown eyes, an adherent of the new church. He had no objection to Nadya, and even Frumkin, who loathed the new church as heartily as the old, grudgingly admitted the priest to be a tolerable creature.

They had a party there to celebrate John's arrival, for he came with Peter and Mrs. Pennifold a few days afterwards. John came over to the priest's house, bringing Peter with him. The priest was there (he had been Father Polycarpe, but now called himself Narimanov), Frumkin came to look at the Americans (he didn't distinguish between the two branches of the Anglo-Saxon race), and there was Nadya. From time to time people from the village came to join them and left as they came, with a greeting but no formality. From somewhere the priest produced samagonka and the little party was soon very merry.

John sang and danced, improvising on his balalaika or the priest's guitar, as he had learned to do whilst he was with Grisha and Jenny. The priest had a magnificent bass voice and joined in the singing. Indeed, as the night wore on, he sang some very unpriestly songs and it appeared that, although he had assumed the enlightenment of the new church, he had not altogether rid himself of the habits of the old. Frumkin quarrelled with him over religion. Peter sang English songs out of tune and looked unhappily at Nadya's rich and youthful beauty. John and Nadya, of course, sat arm in arm and talked as lovers talk when they are young, healthy and happy.

Frumkin, whom no amount of drink ever affected in the least, unless it were to make his long nose redder, and the fringe of his moustache damper, had got completely absorbed in his argument, so that he quite forgot to criticize the Americans, as he had meant to do.

"New church, old church, where's the difference?" he was saying. "You just muck honest men's minds up in the same old way with your gods and your Jesus Christs. What's it matter if you do put 'Workers of the world unite!' on a red banner over the altar, if you make all the silly fools bow and scrape to old man God just as they used to do? I'll tell you something now that will make you sit up. I'm only a peasant and you're an educated man, but this is the truth. It says in your book 'Thou shalt not worship God and Mammon,' or something like that, but I say, 'Thou canst not worship God and Man.' So choose, God or Man. I'm for Man. That's why I'm a Communist. You're for God and you'll lead the peasants into just as muddy a bog as they were stuck in before. What's wrong with our peasants? They don't worship man, they worship ignorance and dirt and greed, and excuse it by calling it God. I know, I am a peasant."

Narimanov stood up, his short black beard bristling, his dark eyes burning. "God, I tell you," he cried. "God, not man! That is your error, that is the gulf between us. I am the real revolutionary when I cry to you, worship God, not Man. What is the man you worship? A weak, sensual, passionate creature, the plaything of circumstance. But God is above and beyond and within at the same time. When you say worship man it is no guide, no light through the dark ways of life. When I say worship God I am seeking for something that shall reconcile all, good and evil, the dark and the beautiful. That is something that can only be done by worship in a temple."

"Hell," said Frumkin. "Your God is nonsense. Will

your temples tell us how to build socialism in Russia? Will they solve the troubles of millions of peasants in this country? You can't think out electrification in a church. I tell you religion is a growth of the dark peasantry, of servitude. It doesn't belong to the modern world, whatever fancy words you dress it up in."

"Better worship the devil than worship man," cried the priest, and in his black cassock, with his burning eyes, he did not look unlike the devil himself. "Man with his lust and folly, his cruelty and stupidity! Worship the devil and at least you worship pure evil, at least you come near to the essence of things, for you cannot have evil without good. It is only the reverse of the medal."

Here Frumkin stood and faced the priest brusquely. "Look at me," he said, "old Frumkin, the Bolshevik. You know, priest, that for years I have been an outcast in these villages, that every gendarme knew me and hunted me as though I were a wild beast. I've been in prison, done hard labour with thieves and murderers. When I talk of lust, of cruelty, of madness, I know what I'm saying. With you it's only words from the Bible. But I still believe in man. Can you tell me why?"

The priest laughed. "Old Frumkin that every gendarme used to chase, now the peasants point at him and say, 'There's Frumkin, that they used to beat and put in gaol, now he shoots gendarmes and is stronger than a magistrate.' That's progress, isn't it?"

The melancholy peasant sat down again and glowered at him over the table. "What if I have hunted the gendarmes down as they hunted me once, and what if I have shot them down like beasts? I did it because I know there's something in me that must live, that those swine tried to crush, and there's some kinds of revenge that you won't ever understand. Man's the lord of life. Of all that exists only man knows that he exists, and fights con-

sciously for more life, freer existence. You can't get over that, priest."

"And when man exists no more? What then? How can you fight, and strive, and kill, when you don't know what it will bring you to in the end? When this planet is cold, and man is dead, what then, Frumkin?"

"Then I don't care. And it is no comfort to me to know that when I'm dead God lives, anyhow."

John did his best to translate to Peter, whose mind grew confused as he drank the fiery white spirit that he was so unused to. He began to recite poetry to John, who listened smilingly and translated in turn to Nadya, who laughed and called him a brave fellow.

> "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
> Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

"What does he say?" the priest asked, smiling.

John translated, and they all laughed together. Frumkin got up, took his cap, and prepared to go. "Ozymandias is what you should be called," he told the priest, and went home, for he had a long journey the next day. Peter, John and Nadya still stayed behind. The priest drank on and his dark eyes glittered more intently. He flung open all the windows of the room and the summer night floated in, fragrant with the promise of the harvest.

"The land prospers," he cried. Then he turned to John and Nadya. "Youth is served at last. Love is free to create and a new race is arising. But where in all this is God? The stars are bright with a new fire and the old moon is red. God is not asleep and you are part of him."

Nadya rose and stood at the window. "God is dead, old Ozymandias. Man is born." John stood beside her and

plucked at his guitar, bursting at last into a song in which Nadya joined him, and even Peter with his tuneless voice and halting Russian attempted to follow. "We'll go to Heaven and bust up the show," they sang happily, gaily. Then John ceased; there was silence for a moment, the priest standing behind, tense, with his burning eyes intent upon their youth. John glanced at Nadya, his eyes were lost in hers and he was singing again—

Darkling eyes, eyes of fire,
Eyes passionate and beautiful,
How great my love for you,
How terribly I fear you.

The priest had drunk too much. He reeled and caught at the table to support himself. "A new race is born," he muttered, and then, "A fine race that shall pass through the eye of the needle. God is not dead, but certainly the camel is dead, the evil old capitalist camel."

CHAPTER V

PETER was sitting at Sunday morning breakfast with Mrs. Pennifold. John was not there, he had disappeared when Saturday's work was finished, and had not been seen since. He rarely came home now before two or three in the morning and had suborned the servant girl to leave a window open for him each night on that account. One night she had forgotten to open the window and John had climbed in through Mrs. Pennifold's bedroom window. Faith considered herself broadminded, but she had nevertheless objected strenuously, and indeed when she woke suddenly in the night to see that dark boyish head, the broad shoulders and the moonlight on the round throat,

coming through the narrow window, she had been unable to prevent the thought arising that if any one had seen John doing this, it would have been difficult to convince them of the innocence of the whole thing. She had never mentioned it to any one, but Peter knew nevertheless, for John had not felt the same reticence about the peradventure.

"Peter," she said, buttering with great care a slice of white bread, "what is the matter with John?"

Peter looked up, no sign of inward smiling in his candid eyes. "With John? Nothing, surely. I believe he has just joined a trade union of some sort and is taking a class at nights in the village. He is very serious about social work."

Faith's large eyes fixed him steadily. "Peter, you don't get away with that sort of thing here. I believe you're in league with him. Why does he stop out all night? Why is he never in before three or four in the morning? Why, when I take him with me on a tour round the villages, does he always find some excuse to get back a day before we should?"

"Really," said Peter, "I didn't know he came in so late. I always go to bed early myself, and I have never heard him," and he looked straight at her very innocently.

Faith blushed, and, despite her maturity, her blush was not unattractive. Furthermore, she knew she blushed and she was angry at it. "Well, I know he does. We have to be very careful about our behaviour, working in a foreign country. It's only because the Quakers and every one connected with them have such a disinterested standard of conduct that we're able to work at all. A scandal would ruin us for the people here, and you know it, Peter."

Peter did know it. He also knew that Faith's whole heart was in her work and that she would suffer if the work suffered. Whether the work was necessary or not

was another question. Once, no doubt, it had been so. But Faith was a good woman and Peter liked her, though she was an egotist and difficult in many ways.

"Quite frankly, Faith, what John is and does is something neither you nor I will ever have control over. Personally I don't think he is playing the village Don Juan because he stops out at night. He has his own strange life and lives it. A boy who has had a life like his is beyond the comprehension of simple folk like you or me."

"Bah!" Faith exclaimed, pushing her cup away and lighting a cigarette. "Nonsense! He has no morals or scruples, and I'm afraid of him."

Peter could not help laughing. "Afraid of him! Why, he's only a boy."

"Yes, he's only a boy, but at times he might be a man of forty. He has no roots in any kind of life we know, and no restraints or decency."

"But he's not so bad as all that, Faith. You don't know him or you would realize that there's all sorts of remarkable possibilities in him, if only he can get on the right track."

"That may be, only somehow I can't believe very strongly in his staying long on any track. When I'm with him I sometimes feel as though all the dirt of all the slums of the world is in him."

"He certainly hasn't moved in the most refined circles, but you can't deny there's a lot more than that to him."

"Oh, I don't deny there's a certain poetry of the slums, a certain romance in vagabondage, where a strong enough character is concerned. All I say is, I'm not going to have him spoiling our work. If he does, back he goes to America."

Faith was a determined woman, and her first romantic feeling for John had fast turned to dislike when she saw that she would never be able to control him. Peter, who

was far more romantic than she was, stood up for his friend.

"He is remarkable, with his energy and strength he'll do something one day that will make people sit up."

She sighed. "Perhaps. However, I'm not interested in that, and your effort to see the founder of a new race of men in every strange creature you come across makes me sorry for you. Peter, when you're about forty you'll begin to regret it." She got up to go into her own room.

"You don't like John because he doesn't believe in you," was Peter's defence.

She stopped by the door. "Oh no, that isn't the reason at all." But she blushed, and Peter saw that he had struck home more deeply than he thought.

He rose also and went over to the window. "You know," he said meditatively, looking out on to the wide and sunburned village street, "we English middle-classes are too apt to adopt people for their own good without asking their permission. And we cling on to what we adopt as though it were a part of ourselves. If anybody raises doubts as to the good we are doing, or as to its necessity, then we are as mad as a she-wolf whose litter is threatened."

Faith answered impatiently. "That is nothing to do with what we are talking about, Peter. You know it hasn't, though it may be true in some ways." And she went out abruptly, to read her Bible and meditate in her own room.

But Peter knew it had. He knew that Mrs. Pennifold had adopted the Russian peasants, that she admired them like clever children, that she scolded them like naughty ones, that she wanted no interference in her self-appointed task of raising their cultural level to hers and that she resented what she considered the rivalry of the Government in interfering in the welfare of her children, and that above all she could not tolerate any one who doubted

the essential goodness and disinterestedness of her work. Thinking of all this and of John and Nadya, he put on his panama hat, sighed, and went out for a walk.

It was mid-July, and the air was hot, hotter than Peter was used to, and he walked slowly. Pavlovka lay in the midst of the open steppe, the nearest forest over thirty versts away, and there were few trees to protect one from the remorseless sun, some silver-plumed and slender birch, two or three dusty poplars, and by the little river, reduced now to a trickle between its high, hard-baked banks, occasional forlorn willows. The steppe itself was golden-brown with the harvest, and lovely with the wild flowers of red and blue that drooped thirsting in the stubble beneath the burning sun. He looked over the steppe, heavy with the harvest, saw here and there men and women at work binding the sheaves where the corn had been cut, and the lumbering carts piled high with golden grain coming slowly in over the purple-brown stubble to the village. It was Sunday, but many were working, for the harvest was the first since the world had gone mad with the fury of war, since the black famine had retreated from the land. It was theirs, the fruit of their earth and their toil, and they were gathering it in.

From the direction of the river he saw two figures strolling, a youth and a girl. They came nearer, straight, handsome figures, the girl with a scarlet kerchief bound about her fair head, her sturdy legs bare and brown beneath the short skirt, and the boy bareheaded, with curly black hair, his shirt open at the throat to show his bare sunburned chest. They were John and Nadya. A little white mongrel dog followed them, a new find of John's, which he had christened Grishka.

Peter gazed enviously at them, and since it was too hot to be pleasant for him, followed slowly behind them as they strolled arm in arm towards the village. On the out-

skirts Nadya parted from John and he went on with the gambolling mongrel, up the untidy, grass-grown street, till he came to the square where stood the white, green cupolaed church, the schoolhouse and the Ispolkom. From the church came the sound of singing and the drone of prayer. John stood listening, Peter not far behind, but not interrupting him. Grishka, the mongrel, who had a curious mind, bent his attention also to the singing and the drone of prayer. And then, perhaps because the heat and flies were troublesome outside, perhaps because the church gave promise of a dark and cool interior, perhaps merely because he saw John's attention fixed upon the open door, and he wished to see what was interesting his master, Grishka trotted into the church and was lost to view.

John looked up, smiled and followed him inside. Fascinated, Peter drew up to the door and glanced within, blinking at the darkness after the brilliance of the sunlight. Gradually he was able to distinguish the rumps of innumerable peasants, men and women who were bending towards the altar screen. The choir sang a deep and sonorous note of triumph. The screen opened and the priest appeared, splendid in white and gold, holding aloft the body of his Lord. The screen closed again, the service proceeded, and the worshippers were on their feet, when Grishka yelped, for the heavy foot of a muzhik had come down upon his paw.

There was a stir of superstitious horror in the church. For to a Russian peasant the dog is a beast of almost supernatural uncleanliness. Grishka retreated to the wall, yelping piteously, and the muzhik who had trodden on his paw was lifting his boot to kick him unmercifully out when John dived forward and sent him staggering. He picked up the whimpering dog and prepared to walk out. But the stir of horror gave place to a cry of rage and a crowd of angry menacing shadows closed round him and

cut him off from Peter's view. He would have rushed in himself to help his friend but the voice of the priest rose deep and stern above the hubbub, and the white-garbed figure moved down to part the crowd. He heard the rich voice speak curtly and guessed rather than knew that John was safe.

He drew back into the street relieved, and in a moment John came out unharmed, Grishka in his arms, his face flushed and his eyes hot, but otherwise himself. He saw Peter and smiled.

"It's lighter out here," was all he said, and they walked back together in silence to the Quaker house.

Faith Pennifold heard of the incident that same afternoon, and Peter was surprised to find her almost in tears over her afternoon tea and biscuits.

"He'll ruin everything yet," she told him. "How can we get the confidence of these people if John behaves like this? Taking a dog into the church! It's sheer sacrilege. He was lucky to get out alive."

"It was rather the dog took him," Peter assured her, and told the story as he had seen it.

But she would not be consoled. "It doesn't matter. The peasants will never believe that. They will think that the Quakers are trying to throw contempt on their religion and so force them to change it. Look at that ridiculous story that got around during the famine, that we would not give food unless they would take a Bible with it and promise to come to our meetings!"

Peter felt that the situation was difficult. "Suppose I go round to see the priest and explain everything to him? He will put things right with the peasants."

"You can if you like. He is a good man, but if this sort of thing goes on we shall be driven away. It makes me terrified every day lest news should come of some terrible

escapade or other." Faith had her mind on John's nocturnal absences, but she did not reveal this.

"Well, I will go," said Peter, and so disturbed was Faith she forgot that if he went he would have to take John with him to interpret. Later, when it was too late, she remembered this and swore to herself that John must go if any more trouble arose. And then when the oath was made she felt upset lest she was being unfair to him for some reason she could not fathom. Men had always irritated her, yet she could not despise John as she had done her husband, for example, or as she did Peter. She told herself it was because he was only a boy, and retiring into her room she wept a little, and then prayed to herself, a big unhappy woman, who might have been beautiful had she not been so heavy, so untidy, so strangely self-conscious through her large, prominent blue eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE priest was alone when Peter entered. John had completely disappeared, and so too had Nadya; but he determined to blunder on as best he could with his inadequate Russian, for at least, as a result of John's teaching, he could form his sentences and understand much of the sense of what was said to him.

The priest smiled rather sadly as he came in, and motioned him to sit down. For a long time neither of them spoke, and Peter would have gone away but that he was determined to be of help to John, if it were at all possible. At last Narimanov stirred and looked at him, his great dark eyes unhappy with some torment he was wanting to express, but dared not.

"Where does he come from?" he asked.

Peter struggled with the difficulties of the language.

"From America, yet he is not American, for his father was an English sailor and his mother an island woman from the Pacific."

"So." The priest's voice was hardly more than a whisper. He seemed to be meditating rather than conversing. "An island woman. Crowned with flowers, a daughter of the summer stars. And his father an English sailor—no ordinary vagabond, I suppose, but a man of strange fancy and rich mind." Then he raised his voice and spoke directly to Peter. "Yours is a curious race, sir; it is low in culture, for though I have never travelled, I have heard that it is not possible for an educated man to sit for a night in an English theatre, and among your own people, even your greatest writers are said to be known only by name outside a very narrow circle of intelligentsia. It is true, I believe, that in your country alone torture forms part of the penal system, and that boys and girls alike are flogged in your schools. Yet this is the twentieth century, and in spite of your barbarity you have produced some of the richest minds of all time."

Once again he became meditative, half whispering. "Russia is an atheist land. A dog in a church. Did he bring it in because he despised the House of God? Or was it indeed an accident? It does not matter, since the effect is all the same. Holy Russia, they say, yet in this country we have never known God. In the old days they used to say 'God and the Tsar,' and nobody thought that the Tsar was a dog befouling the church of God. Nevertheless it was so then, and may be the son of the island woman knew it." He turned to Peter. "In England do they say 'God and the King'?"

"Yes."

"Then it is the same with you. You also have a dog in the church, befouling the House of the Lord and the Name

of the Lord. God and the King, God and the Tsar, but never simply 'God.'" He fell silent again and dimly through the unfamiliar speech Peter realized that the defiling of the church had been causing him agonies since that morning.

The priest's dark head was bowed upon the table, resting between his thin pale hands. After a long pause he raised it again to speak to Peter.

"He comes here each night, this friend of yours, to see his Nadya. Nadya, she is a beautiful girl, a Russian. Such girls you do not find in other countries, young man. She is brave and her pure eyes can look on all things without hurt; she is gentle, yet strong and clean-limbed as an antelope on the Asian steppes; her heart is as warm and deep as the summer night; and when she loves it is like fire on the evening sea."

He paused once again and then continued. "They are beautiful, those two. My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy and black as the raven. Thou art beautiful, oh my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners."

The head fell down again between the pale hands. There was silence. . . .

Though the night was beautiful, the lovers were not at peace. For the first time John and Nadya were quarrelling.

"It was a silly thing to do," Nadya was saying. "If it had been one of us there would have been the devil to pay."

"All I did was to fetch him out of the church," John answered stubbornly.

"But why did you ever let him get in? You didn't care."

"And if I didn't? Do *you* care what happens to their church?"

"You know I don't. But you know that it's mad to go fooling around with their superstitions like that. Because

you're a friend of mine, now they're all saying you are a young Communist, that it was done on purpose, and that we ought to be turned out of the village. If it isn't hushed up somehow our work here's going to get a nasty smack."

"That's all you care about, your work. Don't I count for something? I tell you it was an accident. If you don't want to have anything more to do with me, I'll go."

Nadya was tired. She had worked all week in the fields, beneath the burning sun, till her arms were burned black, scratched with the rough stubble and aching. But she did not want to quarrel.

"You know that's not what I mean at all, Vanya. Only there's something wild in you that does no good."

He laughed. "You've found that out at last! That's what they all say. You're a good boy, Vanya; you're strong, and intelligent, and good-looking, only you will keep doing things we don't like. So go to hell, Vanya, into the muck you came from."

She looked quickly at him, troubled. "No, Vanya. Don't say such things. I know you've had a rotten life. You know I wouldn't turn on you for that." He had touched her on the surest spot. She thought she had wounded him and was all swift eagerness to ease the hurt.

He wanted to make sure of her and deepened his bitterness. It was not hypocrisy, only a weapon he had accidentally found that had power over her, and he used it because he wanted her.

"Oh, but it's true. There's no pretence in me. I'm naked life. As I think, I act, and every one goes for me because I don't pretend I'm wicked. I didn't choose to be born without a home, to be chucked in the gutter and left to make the best of it. And when I say, the gutter's like this, or people like me do this, or that, then you turn on me for a hooligan."

"No," she protested, "I don't. I'm your friend, Vanya,

and that means something. Only you can't always be as you are now. You must live, and is this the only way you're ever going to live, without purpose, anyhow?"

"Well, give me a purpose, and I'll get where you want me to get. Let's go to Moscow. I'll show you there what I can do!"

"So you'll leave the Quakers?"

"Like a shot, the first chance I get."

"Vanya, I sometimes feel you may leave me also."

He trembled, ever so slightly. "Why?" he asked.

"Because you don't seem to belong here yet. You have no country, and I can't find out what makes you go from place to place. Do you want something, or are you just a wanderer born?"

"I don't know. I'm thirsty to see people and know things. I like to mock them and make songs about them. And somewhere in me, deep down, is something I don't understand, that really moves me."

"What sort of a thing?"

"I don't know. But"—his voice dropped uncertainly—"I think it's hate."

"What do you mean? What of?"

"I don't know, I can't tell. Only a long time ago, back in America, things happened, and they keep coming back to me, and they make me do things, they make me a hooligan, for that's all I am, I suppose."

"No, Vanya, tell me, explain to me."

"I can't." And he fell silent, glumly quiet, because in fact he could not explain, but always at the back of his mind there was the picture of Shurin, drunk and terrified, sitting in the parlour of their little house and moaning, "Oh, my God, my God, what beasts men are!"

They walked on together, arm in arm, but silent and troubled, for the first time realizing what depths were still untravelled between them. . . .

Back in the priest's house Peter was still sitting, struggling uncomfortably to talk with that difficult man.

The priest had stood up at last and was answering his clumsy questions. "No, he will be safe enough if I tell them it was an accident, and that he came into the church to fetch out the dog. They will believe whatever their priest tells them. Their priest." He laughed a little bitterly.

"Thank you," Peter said, rising also and preparing to go. "You understand, he does not know I have been, and it is not on his behalf but for the Quakers I am here."

The other waved his white hand a little impatiently. "Of course, I understand." He turned round and looked Peter full in the face with his unquiet eyes. "All the same, the dog was there. God and the Tsar, as they used to say," and he laughed. Peter wondered if he had been drinking again.

"I have been a priest for twenty years," he went on. "And I never believed in the Tsar because I loved God and helped the poor. Yet they always used to say, 'Church and country,' 'God and the Tsar,' and now I think that perhaps they were right, that all these things should be linked together. They are all vile, because of man they take no account. Even that surly old Frumkin, that old fanatic, even he knows that man is enough without the rest. The peasants turned on the dog, and on the boy, all those disciples of mine against a little dog and a boy." He turned round and looked out of the open window again.

Two young lovers passed by the house, arm in arm, and the head of one was bound in a scarlet kerchief, while the head of the other was covered with curls, dark like the waves of the sea at night.

The priest was talking softly to himself. "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm-tree, and thy breasts to clusters of

grapes. Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

CHAPTER VII

THREE days after the affair in the church Peter came in from a morning's work at the Mission warehouse to find Frumkin sitting uncomfortably on the edge of a chair, while Mrs. Pennifold, equally unhappy, faced him across the table. The only person at ease was John, who was translating. Mrs. Pennifold appeared to be trying to obtain Frumkin's consent to some scheme for altering the existing arrangements with regard to certain home manufactures the peasant women undertook in exchange for Quaker supplies of various commodities. After obstinately refusing to yield an inch to her arguments, Frumkin at last, for no reason whatever that Peter could see, consented to let her have her way.

During the argument Faith had flushed with vexation, but had managed to keep her temper. When she had obtained what she wanted she thought she would placate Frumkin and spoke to him directly in her broken Russian, leaving John as interpreter on one side.

"I hope," she said, "that the trouble in the church on Sunday has not irritated you."

"No. Why should it?"

"Well, it was our fault, one of our Mission; though no doubt it was an accident. I thought perhaps you would be annoyed."

Frumkin laughed. "The dog could have pups in the church for all I care."

He was rude and Faith flushed. "But the peasants care. Surely you don't want them to feel angry and resentful

because their religion has been flouted? That will help neither you nor us."

"The peasants don't care. Or rather only some of them do, old kulaks and their wives whom the priest has already told to shut up about the whole business."

"But surely the priest himself is angry?"

Frumkin looked at her from under his prominent shaggy brows, his pale eyes expressing scorn and pleasure at once. "The priest is glad," he said shortly.

Faith pushed back the heavy hair from her temples with a weary hand. "Glad," she faltered. "I don't understand."

"The priest," he explained, "is not such a bad fellow."

"Why? Surely if he does not mind his church being defiled he is not a priest at all."

"Exactly. He is only a priest in name."

"Then he has left the church?"

"It appears so."

"But he seemed to me such an earnest, religious man, with such warmth for his new church, more like one of us than the old orthodox clergy."

"Oh no, not exactly like one of you. He believed in his new church all right, or rather he believed in himself, till a few days ago. Now that's all gone, he tells me." Frumkin was almost expansive.

"What has made him change?"

"Ah, that he didn't say, but I suggest you ask our Vanya here. He has been going there every night, though not exactly on a religious errand!" and Frumkin smiled, showing his yellow, strong teeth, pulling his ragged moustache.

John had left the room as soon as Faith began to speak without his help, and almost unconsciously, in spite of herself, she continued to argue with Frumkin because she was angry with John, because she hoped to get Frumkin to say some word of disapproval of his action, at which her

whole being revolted. She had begun to dislike him, though she would not yet admit it to herself, and had felt that all the time during her first discussion with Frumkin on the question of the peasants' work John was in his heart taking his side against her, against the Mission, against her religion. She had liked him at first, perhaps rather more than she ought to have done, because he had seemed a wild, desolate boy, very charming and beautiful, whom she might mould to serve her, whom she might make into something civilized and gracious and just a little pious, some one whom she could understand. But the John who had grown before her eyes she could not understand and she was hostile to him. She came back obstinately to her argument.

"What Ivan Ivanich did was abominable," she said decidedly.

Frumkin shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you say so, but it is of no interest to me. He is an American, a member of your Mission, and I shall not make any complaint. If he had been a Russian, a young Communist, it would have been different perhaps, and we might have found an enquiry necessary. As it is, let sleeping dogs lie, and I should advise you not to worry." He picked up his shabby black portfolio and made as if to depart. It was characteristic of Frumkin that once he had made his entry into a village the rifle and revolver were no more seen and the portfolio took their place.

Mrs. Pennifold could not be shaken off. "But suppose our Mission takes action and dismisses him? He's a member of a Russian trade union. What will the position be then?"

Frumkin turned round and looked her stolidly in the face. "Why, then the union will have to make an enquiry. Let sleeping dogs lie, citizen."

She gave up in despair and decided to fling herself on his mercy. "Comrade Frumkin, why are you so hostile to

us? What have we done? You speak to us as though we were not human, as though we had no feelings, as though we hated you. Why do you always try to score off us?"

He put his portfolio back on the table, and leaned over it, a little surprised at this passionate woman's outburst. "Why, I don't know. Is that so? You are a bourgeoise, I am a peasant, but I don't hate you. No, I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do," she insisted, and for the first time since they had met she found herself compelled to tear down the barrier that separated her from this ridiculous man, with the red nose, the shaggy, wet moustache, the small unshaven chin, whose pale eyes nevertheless looked at her with such strength, such obstinacy.

"You know that you hate us Quakers. Why is it? We have come here to help you, asking nothing, with no afterthoughts. Isn't that true? Yet you wish us gone, with all your heart."

Frumkin thrust both hands into his pockets and looked at her dourly, like an angry dog. "Yes, with all our hearts we wish you gone. You asked me and I've told you." He picked up his portfolio and prepared once more to go.

But still she would not let him. "Why? I want to know that. What have we done, what are we, that you feel like that? When I talk to you I am always talking to a stone wall. You are indifferent to us; sometimes you do not even seem to hate us; you are just indifferent, despising."

And all at once she began to realize what the truth might be, how she had never liked Frumkin simply because he had not respected her for her education, her cleanliness, her conscious virtue, her self-conceit with all things English and Quaker; because she had always looked on him as an uneducated worker who should be grateful that such persons as herself were willing to help him, and he had never responded to that attitude. On the contrary, he

looked down on them all. So did Panimarov, the President of the Ispolkom, for that matter, but he was an educated man and she had conceded him the right because he was an equal. This man was of a different race, and as he faced her once more with those intense and watery eyes she felt things that she was afraid of rising up in him, she felt that she was defeated.

"You have your religion; it is not mine, he answered her. "You come here to Russia and you help us. Thank you for that; but all the same you came, not as comrades to help comrades, you came believing you had something to give us beyond the bread and clothes you brought. No," he put up a hand to stop her interrupting, "you did not come to convert us into Quakers, that's true: all the same you came believing that you alone knew the truth, that what we were doing was the worthy game of little children, and you took from us a stretch of territory to play with, to show us how we ought to behave. I say play with, for it is you who are the children, not us. You took it to play with, and we had to let you because we needed what you brought. You ask me why I hate you. I don't. I've just no use for you because you are blind and cannot see, blinded with your own damned sense of moral and racial superiority. Excuse me, I'm a muzhik. I'm rough in speech. Just one of those Russian children you came to play with. Good day, citizen."

And this time he went.

Peter looked curiously at Mrs. Pennifold. She appeared absurdly young at that moment because her face was flushed with anger. She felt his glance and turned towards him.

"Well," she asked challengingly, feeling that he too was hostile.

"Well," he answered, "we're alone. We belong to a different world and he has left us together. I tell you

frankly I wanted to go out with him and leave you here. My heart went with him, but I stopped. Intellectual. The new world has no place for us."

"Nonsense," she said shortly. "No world can live without us." Then all at once appealing, almost tragically, "What have we done, Peter Jebb, that we should be doomed to extinction? What have we done that they should ignore us and despise us? It can't be, it can't be."

"It is," was all that Peter said.

"You're wrong, hopelessly wrong, as wrong as that man Frumkin," she assured him. "We're honest, we are capable, we have ideals, how can we be ignored?"

"Again, I can only say that we are ignored, Faith, and the world has not stopped."

"No, but it will if it goes on for long without us."

"Faith, none of us is capable of accepting life at its very worst. The Bolsheviks have done that. They have looked at the world as it is and are not afraid. Only Christ before them accepted the thief, the murderer, the prostitute as equals, without pretence, without affectation. For you those people are brothers and sisters only in theory. Frumkin can mix with them and they are brother and sister to him in fact. It shocks you. It shocks me also, but because I realize that for me that would be impossible, and that there will always remain something in humanity I must deny."

"Peter, I never knew you were capable of a sermon before. But it is only words," and she left him.

CHAPTER VIII

As soon as John finished work for the day he made his way to the priest's house, according to his custom, there to wait till Nadya should come home. That night she was at a meeting of the Cell Bureau and would be late,

so till she came he sat talking with the priest, who was in a communicative mood.

"Is it true," John asked him, "that there is a village of Mormons not far from here?"

"Quite true," the priest answered, as he placed a bottle of fiery samagonka on the table. "The village of Logachovka, thirty versts from here, on the edge of the forest, is a Mormon village. No one has ever discovered the nature of the rites they perform there, for the place is not too easy to come at, in winter and spring being quite isolated. Moreover, strangers are not welcomed, and they put guards on their chapel when they meet for service."

"And are they Russians?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose so, though round here they call them heathens, Chuvashes, but as far as I know they're Russians. Maybe they are mixed with Chuvashes or Mordvars."

"And nobody knows how they became Mormons, or what they do?"

"It is said that a generation ago some returned emigrant converted them by his preaching, but how much truth there is in that I don't know. He is said to be the father of half the village and a great prophet. It appears that he used to get drunk and beat the girls with a birch, until, inspired by the exercise and the sight of blood, he gave vent to remarkable prophecies. But this is all hearsay, and he died before I came to this district."

John mused. "It might be interesting to see," he said, half to himself. "Frumkin was saying something about them. I think he wants to clean the place up."

"He will have his work cut out," said the priest grimly. "They do not relish interference, and there have been ugly stories of the fate that has befallen the few rash intruders there."

John sighed, "Ah well, I suppose he must let them be."

The priest nodded and filled himself another glass of spirit. "Yes, Vanya, we are a queer dark race out here on the steppe. This plain which is so boundless and so wildly fertile has produced a strange people. It is a little more than a century since this steppe was the hunting ground of wandering Kirghizes. They burned and ravished in the villages of the orthodox, and the Cossacks in their turn preyed upon them, torturing the men and carrying off their women. This is neither Europe nor Asia, and the people are pagan at heart. Your Kirghiz from the banks of the Ural, who comes to the bazaars to sell his dried fish and surly-tempered ponies, is not a Muhammadan. In his heart he worships the myriad spirits of nature. Neither is our muzhik a Christian. His dark blood is mingled with strains of Tatar and Hun, and at heart he is still a pagan. A village of Mormons! I am not a learned man in heretical religions, but I have no doubt that the Mormons of Logachovka are as different from the Mormons of Utah as our Christian muzhiks are different from the Quakers of Philadelphia." He filled up and drank again. The fire of the white spirit burned up in his dark eyes. "Our peasants are dark, and cruel, and sensual. But they are strong as the soil they spring from. In springtime the black earth thrusts up violent colour in a night; all the wild glory of spring flowers bursts into flame in a night on these endless plains. And these men and women are careless and strong like the black earth. When they are gay their music tears your heart like the spring winds; when they are sad or angry they are devastating as the frozen plains in winter. Such people—"

"Such people," interrupted John, "are born not from black earth but white spirit."

The priest laughed, pouring out yet another glass.

"It may be. Yet I assure you that even when I am sober they appear the same to me, their white bodies, their

fair hair, their terrible strength, the darkness of their souls, the children of the steppe indeed. No, they are not Christians. The Mormons at Logachovka are a monstrous perversion, but somehow they are nearer to the heart of our people than your pious Quakers."

"Christian?" said John. "What do you mean by that? It is a word without guts, a bladder that any man fills with his wind according to desire."

"That is true," admitted the priest, once more refilling his insistent glass. "We say Christian, but we know not what we mean. For centuries we priests have told men not to do those things which we ourselves do on the quiet, and to do those things which bring profit to ourselves and our masters. This system we have elevated into a religion with rich observances and some poetry of worship. Long ago I saw that this was so. But I thought that beneath all I could discern and love the figure of Christ. Now even that has grown fleshless and unreal."

"Your glass is empty," advised John, whose own was in the same state.

"That is so," said the priest, remedying the deficiency of both. "Christ must have been a man who lived and suffered as ourselves, else He is only a mockery of priests and kings. Yet we know nothing of the fire and suffering which went to make His divine words. Did He love women for example, and know the bitter pangs of unsatisfied desire, the bitter emptiness of sated passion? He must have done, though since the beginning of the Church they have concealed His manhood from us and elevated Him into an ikon. Christ the atheist, Christ the revolutionary, these things are not for us, the people, and of Christ we have only received what our masters thought good for us. The man of sorrows, so they say, but when we try to picture the man of sorrows we are cast forth as blasphemers."

"You will become thirsty if you talk so much and drink so little," John reminded him.

"That is true," he agreed, and filled his glass.

"Is it also true," John asked, "that you are going into the town in order to edit the anti-religious column of the Buzuluk paper?"

"That is also true," admitted the priest.

"In that case," John told him, "you must also denounce the Mormons."

"I shall, for that a man should enjoy many women, or a woman many men, is not unnatural, but that out of this natural enjoyment men should erect a system and a religion is an obscenity not to be borne. To make the captivity and fertility of woman an object of worship is disgusting. To set her free, and from her fertility and man's virility to build a new race is the task of my people, the work of the people of these great steppes."

John felt himself excited. "Let us drink to the future!" he cried, and they refilled their glasses.

"I see a new land," the priest continued. "I see great factories of steel and glass and concrete rising on the plains, light and strong and confident. I see the swift rivers blocked with broad dams and electricity flowing into the darkness of the farthest villages, giving life and power to the waiting factories, giving light to the muzhiks, and bringing man closer to man as the railways spread their steel tentacles over the plain." He rose and fetched two more bottles from the cupboard in the corner of the room. "The white spirit of life, the swift white current that fires existence."

"Quite so," agreed John, his brain reeling as he pushed forward his glass.

"And everywhere, discussing, directing, leading, the Bolsheviks, comrades, one great family, building the new world of the Workers, 'in whose service is perfect free-

dom.' In them the Christ triumphs and man is crucified no more. You, Vanya, are flesh of the workers, your Nadya is a worker, and from your love will be born a new kind of man, without fear and triumphant. I, too, am the son of a peasant, the grandson of a serf, and I have sought salvation blindly in the mists of superstition. Now I have seen salvation in the war of my people against their oppressors, 'He came to bring not peace, but a sword,' in the love of comrades and the conquest of heaven by man."

The priest was musing, the bottles were emptying, and their spirits were low. "'Storming Heaven,'" he murmured, "'Storming Heaven,' in a book by Lenin I read that thus Karl Marx wrote of the Communards in 1871."

John rose unsteadily. "Come outside, priest. The night is hot and your room is close. We have drunk enough."

"Every one is drunk in the village tonight," the priest answered. "Every one but the Quakers and your Nadya with her Young Communists. The harvest is over. The earth has yielded her fruits and we make merry because the toil of the year is over and life is assured for the winter. Listen!"

And as if in response, they heard the sounds of merry-making come in from the village. Through the quiet night they heard shouts, singing, the skirling of harmonicas, the strumming of the balalaikas. "Raz, dwa, tri; one, two three," they heard, and then a loud and merry chorus, drowning the drunken shouts. The village was alive. They walked out arm in arm, supporting one another, singing also.

Outside the wide village street was dark and smooth as a deep flowing river. Like the yards of ships upon the Egyptian Nile, the wooden poles of the wells arched here and there across the street. As they walked down, John lost the priest, and alone he felt the very sensation of

tacking across the smooth dark surface of a river. He wondered vaguely where the Quaker House lay, and what would happen if by mistake he again got in through Faith Pennifold's window.

Nadya should have come home earlier to stop him drinking, to take him home. As he thought of her, with her deep brown eyes like forest pools, her strong and supple body, her laugh, her clear voice, he felt a summer fragrance steal over him and numb his senses. If she saw him now there would be a row. A row as between comrades, a row that would pass when minds were spoken and the air clear.

He longed for her, for her firm voice and strong touch. His head grew more confused, he fell down and was sick. As he lay there drowsily, he heard the throb of the balalaikas and the sound of young voices singing, but he did not know if it was real, or just a dream. A dream—Raz, dwa, tri; raz, dwa, tri. His head was nodding as he lay, and he felt a thousand miles of broad steppe surging round him like the waves of the sea. The stars hung like lamps above, then one fell in a stream of fire, and another. The night was alive, the balalaikas, the voices immaterial in the blue darkness, raz, dwa, tri, and far away the Mormons.

The Mormons in their grey village on the edge of the forest; rites, strange, guarded, ancient, obscene and born of the people of the steppe. A bearded prophet with a bloody birch. He vomited again. Unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX

IN the hour before dawn the village street was still and hushed, but the shapes of houses were clear in the half light, the poles of the wells were obvious in their purpose, the rough surface of rutted earth was no longer

a smooth wide river swimming down the night. John stirred and woke. With a shudder he rose and stumbled down the street, not clear as to where he was, or why, still drunk, and burning to free himself of the burden in his dizzy head.

In the yard of the Quakers' house he made out the stable door, and in a moment was inside, the rank stable smell pricking his nostrils, the sleek cruppers of the quiet horses rising through the gloom. He took out Pasha, the black Kirghiz pony, led her out of the yard, jumped astride and galloped away, out of the village on to the steppe beyond.

The horse flew like an arrow. The grey light became pearl, the flush of the sun appeared in the east, and still they rode, his strong legs gripping her sturdy flanks, the rhythm of speed beating into his confused head, a faint breeze cool upon his tangled hair. The sun rose, an immense red ball, and the black stubble of the harvested plain grew clear for miles around. Still they rode, and Pasha was free on her steppe again, riding towards the Ural, towards her nomad past, remembering that in a day she could cover a hundred versts, swift as an antelope, hardly feeling the weight of the boy upon her back. Her heart was glad. She lifted her head and whinnied triumphantly. And John awoke.

Where were they? He did not know. He held the halter rope loosely in his hand and the earth seemed to spring from the swift feet of the mare. He knew that to try to check her now was useless, that the months of inaction in a Quaker stable, the heavy harness work, would tell in time and break her sudden dream of freedom. Meanwhile they were both free upon the steppe, riding back to the nomad tents, to the youth of the world. Some words of the drunken priest came back to him: "The White Spirit," "Electricity."

"Ah, Pasha," he whispered to her, "gallop, gallop; they

won't need you soon. Soon there will be tractors, great thrashing machines, soon the rivers will be driven from their courses and your hard southern steppe will blossom again and the nomad will strike his tents for ever. Gallop, gallop, but you can't escape."

She whinnied again, triumphant, unheeding, and the black earth flew up from her flashing hooves.

John thought of Nadya, back in the village. She too was riding a horse, but away, away, into a dim future, and as she worked, she and her comrades, railroads spread across the land and great locomotives rushed over the steppe. Factories sprang up, electric power set strong, balanced machines in motion, the earth bore its fruits a hundred and a thousandfold and a new people inhabited the steppes, with rich hearts, white bodies, fearless eyes, and strong fair hair. A different horse she rode, a steel horse.

Beneath him the pace slackened, the gallant heart tired, and John sat up on her back. A low wall of green appeared on the horizon in front, impenetrable, a barrier. It must be the forest, and there on its edge would be the Mormon village they had spoken about the night before. The ground grew more difficult, broken into steep gullies and ravines, so that Pasha's breath came rasping now, in short pants, and he succeeded easily in turning her aside and riding into the forest.

There in the coolness of the slender white birch they came to a halt and stayed till night, Pasha tethered to a tree, while John from the edge of the wood lay watching the grey still village. Night fell, the last night of summer, and the cool breeze began to blow sadly through the plumed trees. Inside the village, so still and silent all day, something was stirring that made Pasha feel uneasy, but she did not move, although she was alone, for John had disappeared in the dusk. Pasha waited, trembling in every limb, her eyes quick with fear, but she did not whinny or

attempt to break the rope that held her to the tree. She waited and the desire of the steppe died in her heart.

John made sure that no one was stirring as he slid from the shelter of the forest into the shadowy moonlight. Indeed the strangest feature of this uncanny grey village was the absence of life, the monotonous silence. During all the hours he had been watching he had seen no one, no children playing, no women drawing water from the wells, no movement of any sort. It might have been a deserted village, save that one could feel, feel almost physically, that somewhere, hidden in those grey log huts, there was life: violent, dark, brooding life. He was sober now, aching from the ride, and as he crept forward, from patch to patch of shadow, he felt uncommonly aware of that hidden life, as though it were a lurking beast.

Once in the street he moved as silently as a cat from dark house to dark house. That there should be no lights was not unnatural, few villagers had kerosene to burn, but that there should be no sound oppressed and angered him. He wanted to shout, to beat on a gate, to do anything to make this village speak. But he dared not, already his quick breath, the beating of his heart, seemed too loud, like an alarum.

He came to a big house, and here he heard a sound, the first, that made him freeze to the earth, terror-stricken. It was the voice of a man, a man demented, praying and calling on the universe, on God, but in a voice of horror, a voice that mingled beauty with obscenity, prayer with curses. It ceased, and as he blotted himself into the shadow he heard a heavy tread as the man came to the door, opened it, and stood for a moment in the light of the moon. The man was a giant, two wild eyes piercing through the grey-black beard which covered his face, and his lips were still moving, not quietly, but bitterly and in torment, as though he wrestled against some demon within

himself. After a moment he pulled to the door and strode off down the street, within a few feet of John.

As soon as he passed John drew in a deep breath. That must be he, the prophet, and the church was here, open. He ran lightly to the door, listened a second, heard nothing and passed inside. The moon flooded through the windows, and he could see perfectly. It was a long, bare building, a low platform at the end, and on the platform a kind of oblong box covered with a black velvet cloth, which he took to be a form of altar.

Where might he conceal himself in such a bare, puritan place? Across the back of the room, which was long and high, ran a beam, not easily seen in the obscurity there, since there were no windows at that point. It was the only place. Like a cat he gripped the crevices in the log wall with fingers and toes, three times he scrambled upwards, so noisily he thought the village must be on him, but the third time he gripped another beam that came out of the wall at an angle, meeting the main beam and supporting it. This gripped, the rest was easy, and he was soon lying flat upon his uncomfortable perch, his heart still beating in the silence loudly and unsteadily.

But the silence did not last long. It was weirdly broken by a great chanting that rose through the village, as though each grim hut had come to sudden life. The hymn seemed to merge and grow stronger, no doubt because the people had come into the street, and then he heard the slow shuffle of many feet as the singing approached. The door was opened and the procession entered, led by the priest, who now wore a white robe reaching to his heels.

The men came first, ordinary peasants, but in the moonlight they had a grim, unreal appearance, and behind them marched the women. The men formed on the left, the women on the right, and their singing ceased. Of the hymns, prayers and ceremonials that followed John un-

derstood little, and that little hardly seemed sense, though it seemed they were celebrating some festival. He grew cramped and tired upon his beam, and began to think that all he had heard of these people was old wives' tales. Then there came a sudden silence that roused him more effectively than the loudest noise.

He looked down. They were on their knees, bowed, strong forms of men and women, gnarled figures of the earth, inclined before that wild bearded giant in his ridiculous white robe. John wanted to laugh, but it was an instinct of fear, for the expression on the man's face was terrible. Once again his lips were moving silently, as though in anguish, in torment. Then all at once he began to speak, a strange speech, half Biblical, half full of the poetry of the seasons, of the seed-time, the ploughing, the bursting up of the young plants, the harvest, of the fruitfulness of the beasts, the bounty of the field. And half his speech was pure poetry, and the other half obscenity, such as John had heard from him on the threshold. He finished, and there came a sigh from his hearers as of expectancy, as though some great thing was coming to birth out of his wild words. Then suddenly outside there was singing, singing which clutched at John's heart, the singing of young girls. The door opened and they entered, four girls surrounding a fifth in a white robe similar to the priest's.

The people rose to their feet, chanting a great chorus, the priest trembled violently, he seemed to be choking, his hands moved up to his throat, uneasily, as though to tear his shirt open.

The rest John saw as though in a dream. A slim white body laid on that black draped altar, the priest tearing off his robe with a half-strangled cry like a beast's, his hairy, giant's body trembling like a leaf, the singing beating up in frenzy to the roof, mingled with sobs and cries, then the

deathly silence that fell on them all when it was over, broken here and there by a murmur, a half-stifled cry.

He clutched at the beam, his strength all done, and hardly realized at last that the room was empty, that they were all gone. He swung down, tried the door and found it locked, so made for the windows till he found one that he could open. He forgot all precaution, forgot the risk, and dropped out into the street, choking for the air. No one was by, but the village was no longer silent, it was full of noise, of men and women laughing, singing, playing on harmonicas and calling to one another. He fled up the street as though pursued by demons, and was sighted as he neared the end, when he saw the forest and freedom in front of him.

Anything to escape. His limbs that had grown weak put out redoubled strength, he fumbled at his belt for the knife to cut Pasha loose. . . .

The moon was full, red at rising and tremendous as a great disc of dull glowing fire, but paling and shrinking as the night wore on to a white circle hanging above the trees. At last, when Pasha felt her heart must burst, when every rustle and whisper in the forest pricked her with unbearable fear, she heard light steps running through the trees.

John cut the rope with a knife and jumped on her back almost in one motion. Then she fled, away into the night, out on to the open steppe, away from the nameless fears and terrors of the forest, from the dull hostility of that silent, grey village. She did not even hear the howl of anger as she sped like a dark bolt from the forest into the white light of the moon, and the shots that were fired were only like the cracking of so many demon whips in her ears.

John bent low, one hand soothingly laid on her neck, and whispered quick encouragement to her. But she needed

none, only the friendly earth beneath her flying feet and the bare miles ahead, so that quickly all sound died away behind.

"Home," John whispered, "home." And she went home, for the desire for freedom had died in the forest.

In the cold dawn they arrived back in Pavlovka. John put her back into the warm stable, acrid with the horse smells that pricked her nostrils with friendly greeting as she stood again in the stall, while her trembling flanks were rubbed down with firm hands.

John did not go in, through Faith's window or any other window, but made his way round to Frumkin's lodging.

Frumkin was in bed and not too pleased to be wakened.

"First you, then that damned priest disappears," he grumbled.

"The priest has gone?" John asked.

"Gone into the blue. Nobody has seen or heard him since the night before last when he was seen drunk with you. Well, I'm not going to weep tears for him; and as for you, if it weren't for Nadya, who's a good kid, I'd have you arrested now for stealing a horse."

"The horse is safe home," John assured him.

"So I suppose," he grunted. "Or I would not be lying so calmly in bed listening to you. Where have you been?"

"To the Mormons."

"What? Without asking permission? Without consulting a soul? And they didn't skin you?"

"No, I am here. And I've seen what they do. I hid in their chapel before the service."

"And what is it they do?" Frumkin sat up in bed.

John told him, and he whistled, the watery eyes hardening under the shaggy brows.

"That's the first time we've ever had direct evidence," he said, and smiled, showing his yellow teeth, under the

wet moustache which was like the dripping weed above a waterfall.

"Now we'll teach them a lesson they won't forget." He got up, pulled on his trousers, slipped on a blouse and washed under the little wall fountain fixed to the stove.

Pavlovka was the volost village, and had a force of twenty militia-men. Frumkin paraded them in the street, strapped on his five-chambered revolver, slung the Japanese rifle across his shoulders, and went into the Ispolkom to get on the wire to Buzuluk. There was no nonsense about Frumkin when he started on a course of action. He was clear, direct and unyielding. People followed him unhesitatingly into the hottest fight because they knew he would go straight through and win, whatever the cost. And it is always safer to win, however dangerous the path to victory. Moreover, his comrades loved him for his roughness as much as his enemies hated him for it.

When he had finished with the telegraph he turned to John. "I shall want you, Vanya, for identification. Get a horse and tell the Quakers you'll not be back today."

John went round to the Quaker house, but first he ventured to call by the priest's and see Nadya. She was drinking her morning tea and was more than glad to see him.

"Vanya, our priest has disappeared. You were a fool to get drunk with him and a bigger fool to ride off, but at least you have come back, and I am afraid that he will not."

"Why?" John asked.

"On my way home the night before last I met him wandering in the street, raving drunk. He was talking about the dark people and as far as I could make out was going to the Mormons to denounce them and convert them. He disappeared and has not been seen since. So either he has gone there and met with trouble, or is lying out on the steppe ill. Frumkin wouldn't bother about him."

"Why not?"

"He said he was only a mad intellectual who had got drunk, and why should he worry about him? In a way he was right, but I liked our priest."

"I have been to the Mormons," John told her.

"What!" she exclaimed, horrified.

"Yes, really, that is where I have been, and Frumkin is taking me there again with the militia. They're going now and I can't wait, Nadya darling, for I must see the Quakers and get a horse. I saw them, the Mormon beasts, the dark people, as our priest called them. When I come back again I will tell you everything."

"Is it as bad as they say, then?" she asked.

"Yes." He kissed her good-bye.

Faith said little when he told her where he was going, but she looked at him in such a way that John realized his days there were numbered. Peter came out with him to help saddle the horse and see him off.

"Keep your eye open for the priest, John," he begged. "He is an interesting sort of chap, and I fear he's gone cracked."

"Too much drink," John said tersely, buckling the girth strap. He brought the horse out, mounted, and rode up to Frumkin and his little troop. A small crowd of curious peasants, among whom were Peter and Nadya, waved good-bye, and they moved off at a trot on to the steppe. Frumkin was in front, his old shuba buttoned up to his neck and spreading down over the flanks of his horse like a rug.

John rode at Frumkin's side. "Nadya thinks the priest has also gone to the Mormons," he said to him.

Frumkin grunted. "What were you two crazy fools talking about that night you were drunk? Now the whole village will be talking of nothing else but Mormons and their rites for a month, and we shall have such a crop of

babies in the spring as a result. What the hell did that priest think he could do? He's not so cute as you, and has no horse. I'm wasting no tears over him."

"He may be dead," John reminded him.

Frumkin did not answer, and John thought he had dismissed him from his mind, but a few moments later, as if to himself, he spoke again.

"Such a man was bound to die soon."

They rode hard, too hard for John, who was now deadly tired, and came to the village in the afternoon. The silent village, grey on the edge of the forest. They halted on the outskirts and Frumkin with the commander of the militia and John rode forward into the village. At the porch of the largest house they stopped, and leaning forward Frumkin battered on the door with his rifle butt. John had the feeling that unseen eyes were watching them from the blind and shuttered houses, but no shot disturbed the quiet, as he feared it might, only the savage, insistent battering of Frumkin's rifle on the door. At last the door opened and a man whom John recognized as the Mormon elder stepped on to the porch. As he came out he burst into a torrent of words, denunciation, prophecy and obscenity.

Frumkin listened unmoved for a moment, and then his rough voice cut in like a sharp saw at the roots of the elder's speech.

"Cut that cackle. You're under arrest. You and the other elders will come with me to the town."

For a moment the elder gazed at him with such violent hatred that John expected to see the mounting blood burst from his knotted temples. The fit subsided and he stood sullenly, speechless. The commander dismounted, went up the steps and bound his hands behind his back with a leather strap. It seemed as though a sigh went up from unseen breasts, out of the very bosom of the earth. Beyond that no sound.

The commander mounted again, holding the end of the strap in his right hand, and with their captive they visited in turn every house in the village, picking out those whom John could recognize as leaders in the ceremonies he had witnessed. The prisoners uttered no word, their women and children gazed frightened, wild-eyed, as though a cold wind from the plain had blown in through the secret doors of their homes, opened for the first time to impious eyes.

"No sign of the priest," Frumkin said; and questioned in vain, meeting with only dark, incomprehensible looks. "Where's their chapel?"

John told him. At a word from Frumkin the commander blew his whistle, and the troop of militia-men rode up. "Bind and guard the prisoners," Frumkin ordered, and when they had done his bidding on the little group, he signed John and the commander to come with him to the chapel. The people had come into the street now, silent still, like cowed and hating animals, but when they saw them batter down the door of the long grey hut which was their temple a groan of sorrow went up along the village street.

It seemed to John, as they battered on the door, that within there was also a faint moaning, but he put it down to his nerves, and beat with greater fury till they had splintered the door to pieces. Inside, over the far wall, something white was hanging in the gloom, moaning softly. They rushed forward and stood in horror before the priest, crucified on the wall, his dark bearded head drooped forward on his breast, blood-flecked foam at the corners of his agonized mouth. With difficulty they lifted him down, laid the poor suffering body on the floor and revived him a little with spirit from the soldier's flask.

He opened his great black eyes and saw Frumkin bending over him, saw the peasant's pale blue eyes filled with

tenderness, horror and pity, and as he died he murmured, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"Poor devil, poor little devil," said Frumkin, and his voice was harsh with tears. "He need not worry, their own people shall judge them, and who is the real murderer will be for them alone to decide."

CHAPTER X

FAITH had been furious when John did not appear the morning after his debauch. When the news came that a horse was also missing, Pasha, the black mare whom she regarded as her own, she found difficulty in not bursting out. As the day wore on, things became even worse, for it was reported to her that John had been seen lying dead drunk in the street, among his own vomit, like a dog, and the same busy tongues gave her a rich tale of all that went on in the priest's house, of John's immorality with Nadya, the pretty young Komsomolka.

At supper that evening she grumbled at Peter as though he himself were responsible for all John's shortcomings.

"It is impossible to keep such a boy here, Peter, and you ought to know it. I was against his coming to Pavlovka from the very beginning" ("How far from the truth!" thought Peter), "and I have been fully justified. He will be getting us into terrible trouble."

"You don't really think he has stolen the horse?" Peter asked, for at first she had even gone so far as half to suggest that.

"No, I don't think so. But who knows what harm he may not do the mare, a wild, irresponsible young ass like that. If she comes back broken-winded I will never forgive him. He has no scruples, no morals, no sense of responsibility, and you encourage him."

"Oh, come," protested Peter. "How can you make such charges? I don't want to defend myself, but he has done nothing yet that I have anything to be ashamed about."

"Well, I am a broad-minded woman in that I won't attempt to apply my standards to the whole world, but the looseness of these young Russians appals me. John is just on seventeen, the girl hardly any older, yet they are practically living together. What sort of a race is going to grow up out of that sort of thing?"

Peter did not know the exact relations between John and Nadya. Indeed, he had often asked himself how intimate they really were, without being able to satisfy his curiosity. On the whole he felt he must protest.

"And if they do, though there is not a shred of evidence save the talk of dirty-minded peasants, where is the harm? They are both physically fully grown and far stronger than you or I. Is the love of young people disgusting? Is there anything beastly about Daphnis and Chloe, or Aucassin and Nicolette?"

"I don't know anything about them," Faith answered shortly, "but sexual relations are a serious business and to make a jest of them, as these young Russians seem to do, is horrible."

Peter felt a little dashed that his literary analogies had failed to convince her, so he returned to the particular case.

"Well, I think you have no right to assume that there is anything of an intimate relationship between John and his girl unless you know of it from themselves. And as for asking them, it's no business but their own. If there is such a relationship it may be firmer, truer, happier than any you know of, Faith."

This was a home thrust, for in truth her own experience had made Faith look with disgust on all the physical contacts of sex. If they were protected by a serious religious

oath or family obligations, that might be just tolerable, but that they should be looked on as acts of joyous pleasure horrified her. She blushed and was silent. The next morning John came in, took another horse and told her he had been ordered to go out with the militia to some village she had never heard of before. Then during the day the story of the Mormons, distended into horrible indecency by a dozen scandalous tongues, reached her ears and made her sick with rage and disgust against John. How could he go poking his nose into such filth, like a dog nosing after dirt?

The prisoners came in the following afternoon and a shudder of horror passed through the village when the news of the priest's fate was heard. It was necessary to keep the Mormons under strong armed guard as a protection against the peasants until they could be removed to Buzuluk, and thence by train to Samara.

The horse and saddle came back to the stable, but still no John. In answer to Faith's questions, Peter said he thought he must be with Nadya, at Frumkin's lodging. In fact he was asleep, worn out.

After the prisoners left there was a sigh of relief, as though a dark cloud had been lifted from them. The dull, cold weather passed. September came in a burst of warm sunshine and John was seventeen. Mrs. Pennifold too felt some relief from the depression which had sat so heavily upon her for the last few days. She went for a walk outside the village, along the little river.

At the bend of the stream concealed by the high bank she heard the voices of a boy and girl, and going to the edge of the cliff saw the bright bodies of John and Nadya splashing in the water below. She drew back quickly, certain now of her suspicions, and made for home. There and then she made up her mind that John should go, and

on entering her room sat down to wait for Peter so that she might inform him first of the decision. She heard a step at the door and looked up, expecting to see him, but it was John.

He smiled at her. "You'll be glad to hear I'm going, Mrs. Pennifold. You and I weren't made to get on with one another, I reckon. Don't bother about my money, as I've missed four days' work. I'm going to Moscow." He paused, and then, just as she was about to speak, "to be married."

Faith said nothing. She had meant to, but "to be married"; her suspicions must be unfounded, base, dirty tittle-tattle; she flushed as though he had slapped her cheek, nodded and hastily went out into her bedroom. John whistled, laughed, and turned away. Outside Peter was waiting. "You're right," he told him, "she took it bad. Peter, you have more sense than I credited you with."

Peter smiled. "Maybe, but I shouldn't have told you to say it if I hadn't been sure it was justified."

John looked up at him. "Oh, really. And what do you know? My dear Peter, you can be sure of nothing." And he walked off to pack his bag.

That night the two lovers walked up the road to the little cluster of trees on the knoll by the bridge over the river.

"Now that we are going to Moscow, now that I really mean to work, and do something, do you trust me now, dearest?" John asked her.

She did not answer at first. Then she turned to him with a sigh.

"No, I can never be sure of you, Vanya. I know that you will leave me just as certainly as I know the day will come."

"And yet you love me?"

"I cannot help that."

"But why should I leave you? I love you also, you believe that, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe you. But somehow also I know there's something between us we shall never break down. I know that you won't stay with me, because you can't stay, because you and I aren't living for the same things, Vanya."

He was angry. "It's not true. Why do you have anything to do with me, if that's so?"

"I'm telling you the truth, Vanya. When I saw you in the garden, that first night, I loved you, but I did not know you. Now I know you, and I still love you, and part of you is the fact that you'll leave me. Well, I don't care, I know it, and I'll face it."

John knew she was right, but he would not believe it. He was afraid to, for in Nadya he felt for the first time something that could keep him from that thing in him which was his curse, that thing which made him a vagabond, that thing he could not understand, which he could get no nearer to than the recollection of Shurin on that awful night when he heard of Pete's murder. Yet he could get no closer to Nadya. She loved him, and he wanted her, but he could not have her, she would not take him. She wanted something he could not give and he did not know what it was, and she could not tell him.

"Nadya, little darling, it's true I've got this cursed thirst for wandering, but I'll kill it somehow if it's in the way. In Moscow, dearest, we'll make a life together. Say that it is possible, dear, say we'll do it."

She looked at him miserably. Her heart was very full. She was tempted to give way, but she knew, she knew so well that he would go, because there was something, somewhere, that didn't fit in their love. It hurt her that she couldn't say what it was.

"I can't," she answered.

"And you love me, really, honestly?" He pulled her to him so that her eyes were level with his, deep, liquid brown eyes, but eyes that did not falter.

"Yes, I love you. More than the night and the stars. Like life itself." She was young and spoke like a child, but her speech rang true.

"Then come to me now, beloved," he urged, pressing her so tightly he felt her heart beat under his arm. "Come to me, and let's see if you can't beat my wandering with your love. Look, Nadya, the stars are like gold-dust in the heavy sky. We are young and on fire. Now, now, while I hold you here."

He spoke desperately, as though it were his one chance of life, and suddenly as he spoke he remembered the Mormons and their moonlit barn, the white body on the altar, the distracted Elder. From the very depths of him the savagery of his mother and her people came up, all the darkness of him; he pushed her away, cried out hoarsely, and ran, ran from the river, back to the village, to people, to safety.

Under the stars, trembling, in the great quiet of the plains, Nadya lay, and she sobbed till she was worn out, and then she slept unhappily, for she did not know and could not tell what it was she wanted, that John could not give.

Part Two

THE CHINESE WALL

CHAPTER I

So in the autumn they came to Moscow together, Nadya finding work at once in a great textile factory that lay in one of the suburbs beyond the river, and a share in a room of the brick barracks where many of the workers lived; while John went to Yasha, who gave him a corner in his little room, in a big apartment house near the Minsk station.

Nadya was busy; between her eight hours in the factory and her many meetings he could see her little, and the memory of that night by the river still seemed to come between them. Or was it something else? John was not sure, but he imagined that each time he confessed his failure to find work, a dullness came over her warm eyes and something rose between them to chill the intimacy they had known in the village. Almost he had begun to regret that easy, lazy summer, and the golden autumn they had spent there. In Moscow it was bitterly cold, bleak winds swept over the squares, round the street corners, rain fell in bitter, driving showers, and then came the first snow. For a week a film of ice covered the cobbles and pavements, the snow being too thin to give a foothold. Then more rain fell. He was wretched as he had never been, but he persevered in his effort to find work, and here Yasha was his salvation. He kept him at the dreary business, encouraged him, helped him, and finally by a mere chance found him what he sought—a chance, because Yasha himself would never have thought of such work for him. Afterwards John often thought of the irony of it,

that it was Yasha who was the unconscious instrument of all that followed! In his position then he could appreciate irony at its bitterest.

But that was afterwards. When he found work he was joyful as he had not been for weeks. It was Nadya's free night, and he purposely did not tell her of his success at first. He was helped in that, though he was bursting with it, because that night of her own accord she had slipped back into the dear friendliness, the lover-like familiarity, that she had shown in the village, before that terrible night.

He walked down the Tverskaya boulevard with her, beneath the friendly, frosted limes, and unconsciously, in the old way, his arm slipped into hers and they were one with the happy crowd. The snow had come at last to stay, it was winter, and the whole town was happy because of it. The night was dark, the trampled snow was still white beneath their feet, the electric lamps in the trees spread a kind of radiance. And all around were black, muffled-up figures like themselves, arm in arm, strolling over the hard-beaten snow, dodging the slides made by the children, soldiers in their ankle-long coats, workers, bourgeois, in twos and threes down the boulevard, from Pushkin's statue to Timirasiev's statue.

"Come to the kino!" said Nadya, and they went into the Goskino on the Arbat Square, took off their coats and goloshes in the cloakroom and walked around the great waiting hall, where the band was playing, walked round with scores of others like themselves, squeezed on to a sofa against the wall, and waited for the doors to open and the séance to commence. Then came the long dark hall with the flickering screen at the end, Nadya next him, her hand in his, all around them people, people, watching the screen, their quick breathing, their excited whispers, drowned by the lively music. Afterwards they stumbled

out again into the light, to wait in the jostling crowd to reclaim coats and goloshes.

"There is no one at home tonight," Nadya whispered, as the cold wind nipped their faces when they came out on to the pavement. "My friend is away to see her mother and will not be back all night. We can talk there." And then they went in a tram across the river, through the shabby, squalid streets and past the factories of Zamoskvorechye, till they reached her home in the big tenement. She sat on the bed, smiling at him, as he stood with his back against the stove, warming himself. A tiny room, with a table, two chairs, the girls' bed, a few paper-backed books and a photograph of Lenin on the wall.

She looked up at him smiling, and he saw that a light was in her eyes, a golden-brown friendliness smiling at him. He could keep his great news back no longer.

"I've done it, dear! I've found work!"

She jumped up, delighted, the old warm tenderness toward him in her heart. "No, Vanya! Tell me now. What is it? Where?" She caught his hand and pulled him impulsively to the bed, beside her, and they sat there, hand in hand like two children, while he told her.

"It was only yesterday, and absolutely unexpected. I went with Yasha to a party of his friends, and among them were two actors from a Blue Blouse Troupe. We were very jolly, singing and dancing, and I suppose I must have had a drop too much or something; anyway, there I was in an hour or two, singing to them, making songs up too, half-dotty, I suppose. I made one about the Quakers, they roared, and then one of the actors told me I was born for the stage." He stopped, looking at her mischievously.

"Well?" she asked, impatiently.

"Well, he said their troupe was one short and just about to begin rehearsing. Would I join?"

"And you did?"

"I should just think I did. I had done all that before, with Grisha and Jenny. I know the tricks. They taught me a lot, and I suppose there's not that much difference between village clowns and the real thing."

She laughed. "How big you speak. You might have been on the stage all your life, Vanya, my dear."

"At least I have been to a rehearsal! I went this morning and was approved, accepted, made one of them."

"And how many of them are there?"

"Five men, including me, and two girls. It's an adventure, they're a new troupe, though I'm the only new actor."

"And even you are a professional of old standing," she teased him.

He laughed, then was silent a moment. "But are you really pleased, Nadya?" he asked at last. "What do you think of it? Tell me."

She became serious. "Really I don't know. It's a queer kind of work. But if you're pleased, Vanya, my dear, if you think it's good, then I'm glad. What *do* you think about it?"

"What do I think about it? I'm mad with joy!" And it was near the truth. The more joy-mad because he had repressed his great news through all that evening, because he was a boy and he saw in this new work a means to win his first love, to blood himself to manhood.

Nadya sighed. "You're a puzzle, all the same, Vanya. Who knows where you'll end? First a sailor, then a vagabond, now an actor. But if you're glad, and if you're going to be something of an actor, why, I'm glad."

He looked glum, his enthusiasm was dashed. It was work and he had thought she would welcome it as he did, rapturously. "Are you disappointed?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, only it's queer to me. An

actor! And I'm a worker in a factory. There's a difference, isn't there? I'm afraid we may lose one another."

"Ah, but you've always been afraid of that," he reminded her, not without cunning. "Now it's for you to see we don't, just as much as for me. There's no reason for it." And he went on to show her why, to explain that their troupe were workers themselves, that their work was chiefly in clubs and factories, that they were the popular voice, very different from the strutting puppets of the Art Theatre, or the intellectuals of Meyerhold.

She agreed, doubtfully at first, then wholly, and kissed him, for the first time that night. His heart beat faster, he began to feel that at last he was finding himself, and the world was his. If only he had her! Then he could face them all, Yasha and the shade of murdered Pete. He would be something new, vagabond no more. All this was in the first enthusiasm, when he still was perfectly ignorant of what this new future meant in terms of solid fact, of human relations and hard reality. In that enthusiasm he thought that the night beside the river could be forgotten, that they might take up again the old relationship, and something more.

Nadya was happy also. She too was willing to forget, but in her heart she was not sure of the future yet. She loved his youth, the supple brown body, the dark eyes and hair, the wayward mouth, the sure strength of his grip and the ready wit. And in spite of all this she held back because of the gipsy that she liked and feared. She could not explain it to herself, but she seemed to sense by instinct a danger from his mad parentage, the truth about which no one now could ever know. Yet she hated herself for this, because it was his curse that was born with him, and to make him responsible was cowardly.

So in the end she said again, "I love you, Vanya, little darling," and they thrust their doubts aside and were

happy together for the next few days as they had been during the summer. Only she kept a last reserve, which he dared not attack since that night of dismal failure; so that nevertheless, in spite of all this it happened that from time to time they were not happy, that they walked together silently, or made excuses to be elsewhere, out of sight.

But on the whole they were glad to be together. On Sunday afternoons, on Monday evenings, when the theatres were closed, they went skating. The wide rink under the electric lamps, light as day, a brass band playing, lively marches, dreamy waltzes, while hand-in-hand they skated round, the cold wind whipping their blood to laughter, hundreds of other young couples like them whirling round, twisting, cutting fine graceful figures on the smooth ice. Moscow was then the citadel of youth, a place of flushed and healthy faces, white teeth flashing between quick lips, young bodies warm with exercise. John was not dissatisfied, and always he hoped, while Nadya fed his hope.

CHAPTER II

THE troupe with which John played was not alone of its kind in Moscow, though it began to have a reputation of its own. Soon they were able to take small studio theatres and appear there for a week, for a fortnight, though their chief performances were still in the factory clubs and other such places. They owed much of their success to Pavlov, the leader, a former fitter in a Leningrad engineering shop. He had a genius for the stage, but above all for popular improvisation such as formed the core of their performances. They burlesqued, they created popular songs, they made little sketches, they danced, they bent all their diverse talents to picturing the

life of working Russia, and the genial Pavlov made them a unity, gave them a character of their own and set tongues wagging on their achievements.

John was liked because of his youth and lively, impudent manner, and also because of his pleasant, not quite Russian accent. But for two months he was only a hard worker, learning all the time, not more remarkable than any of the others in the little troupe. Then there came the incident which made him famous.

They were appearing at a studio theatre that week, and there had been some general talk about their show. A certain ambassador who prided himself on his knowledge of Russian heard the talk, and, prompted by an evil demon, took two friends with him to see a slice of Moscow life, a little "popular art." "It's the same sort of thing as the real Parisian cabaret that you see near the Place de la Republique, only infinitely better," he explained to his guests at an early dinner in the Embassy.

Unfortunately the ambassador had never seen the Blue Blouses, though he impressed his guests as knowing all about them. One guest was a faded middle-aged lady, the other a leather-skinned officer, both of whom liked anything that was "quaint" or "of the people," provided it did not smell too strongly of its origin. So the lady said, "How nice!" and the military gentleman thought the evening might be "pretty interesting," and they went, in ambassadorial evening clothes.

They came anonymously. In the third row of the parterre they were nevertheless conspicuously ambassadorial, and their nationality was, as the military gentleman would have said, "pretty clear." Unfortunately, that night had been set aside for a new sketch which dealt with the relations between certain social-democratic ministers and their King. The King, as played by Pavlov, was a pitiable, anaemic, knock-kneed, red-nosed little man, and he was

played with gusto, also he was the ambassador's very own sovereign. When the news of the unwelcome visitors reached Pavlov he swore, as he had not sworn since he worked as a fitter in the Leningrad factory.

"Well, what are we going to do?" they asked him, crowding round.

"Go on, and make the best of it," he said, adding ungraciously, "We didn't invite them to come."

Some one suggested it might lead to a row. "Row be damned!" said Pavlov. "That'll be his row, not ours."

And they did the sketch. Half-way through, the party in the third row rose with dignity and walked out. They were followed by amused hostile glances, for in Moscow the play's the thing, and interruptions are not welcomed, but their identity was quickly whispered round and there were no remarks passed. Unhappily those on the stage and those at the back could see through the glass doors the ambassador and his friend taking their polished top hats from the cloak-room, and it was a winter evening. Somebody laughed, and the laugh grew, till even those who had not seen the top hats laughed too, the sketch coming to an end in a perfect tempest of laughter. When the laughter died they saw a droll, black-garbed figure, wearing a great white shirt, monocle in hand, a top hat on his head, come mincing on to the stage. After him came a boy in blue workman's blouse, an impudent, brown-faced, curly-headed satyr of a boy, who danced up behind the white-shirted man, and with a deft, acrobatic kick sent the top hat shooting into the wings. Then he sang:

"'Tis we have made Churchill eat his cigar,
And Chamberlain choke in his collar;
Poincare's boiled shirt we've rolled in the dirt,
And Coolidge's pants are pawned for a dollar,
Since the Red Flag on high was unfurled,
And we knocked the top hat off the world!"

The brazen impudence of it fetched the house down. As it happened, there *was* a row, and the sketch had to be withdrawn, but the name of the Blue Blouse Troupe No. 3 was made from that day, and for months afterwards mocking young men and women could be heard all over Russia, singing versions of John's improvisation, of which often enough only the refrain remained of the crude original. But that stuck, and the concession-hunting foreigners at the Hotel Savoy continued for long enough to grin sheepishly as they heard some youthful band cheekily humming:

> "Since the Red Flag on high was unfurled,
> And we knocked the top hat off the world!"

John's name was made. He sang many better songs than that, so that people began to talk of him, and in time to write of him. Trotsky wrote a short article in a literary journal, wherein he praised him as a "trouvère of the Revolution." Lunacharsky wrote another article in the same paper denying this, and pointing out that John's art was only a slightly better form of "cabaret" art, that it lacked the authentic factory ring, or the peasant force of feeling. For a moment it looked as though there was to be a journalistic controversy, and Pavlov was delighted. But it all came to nothing, no more was written of him, and Pavlov was still delighted, since he said it would prevent John from getting swelled head.

Yasha had been at the famous performance, and he suggested a party in celebration. There was some difficulty over finding a room for this, since Yasha's own was out of the question, owing to its size, and none of John's other friends seemed to have a place to accommodate the big party they planned. Then to John's surprise Neura Gurevich heard of the difficulty and offered hers.

"Why don't you come to my place?" she asked. "It's

big enough for twenty. I'll be glad to lend it, besides, you never come to see me and perhaps that way I'll be able to persuade you."

This rather took John's breath away. Neura Gurevich was one of the two girls in their troupe, but up to now she had hardly spoken to John, outside the necessities of business, and he, engrossed as he was with Nadya, had barely noticed her. Dimly he set her aside as Pavlov's mistress, and beyond that never thought of her. Yet it appeared he was mistaken.

"Nikolai Petrovich's mistress!" exclaimed one of his comrades, of whom he now enquired of her. "No, you've made a mistake there, my lad; she was once, for about a week. But our Neura doesn't stay with any man much beyond that."

"Where does she come from?"

"No one knows. I think Pavlov found her in the streets, half starving. He says she had been with some gipsies in a cabaret that was raided by the militia. She got away and he picked her up and brought her to us. That's all he knows about her."

John took more notice of Neura now, and saw that she was also noticing him. She was exceedingly beautiful, not tall, but strongly built with a body as graceful and lithe as that of a mountain tigress. She was no Moscow girl, her sun-browned skin showed that, and the burning dark eyes, with the dusky hair, suggested that she might have been a gipsy. She danced with a kind of savage grace, had a voice that was harsh but curiously pleasing, and her acting went straight home to the people they were used to playing before, workers who appreciated hard hitting and shrewd speech.

"Have you been to her place?" John asked.

"Yes. She has a big room in a flat on the Arbat. It is a fine place full of good furniture and pictures. How

she got it I don't know, or rather I suppose I do." And his informant winked.

"She does that sort of thing pretty often?"

"You bet. She has men trailing after her from all over Moscow and simply plays the devil with them. She won't be stopping long with us, my lad, you can be sure of that, so if she's taking a fancy to you, you had better improve the shining hour."

John shook his head. "No, I've no ambition in that direction."

"Well, you're showing more sense than I credited you with. As for me"—here his informant paused before saying emphatically—"I'd as soon go to bed with a handful of live snakes."

That phrase startled John. He had heard it applied somewhere else by another man to another woman. Who was it? Yes, he remembered, it was Kireiev talking of that girl of Andrusha's, and strangely enough her name had been Neura also. He looked at this other Neura with much more interest when next they met. Her face was rather heavy, he thought, the scarlet lips in the biscuit-brown face a little heavy, heavy the black hair, a heaviness as of a thunderstorm lurking beneath those dark eyes. Her face was not round and high-cheeked like a peasant girl's, nor yet was it quite oval, like the faces of Tadjik girls he had seen in Samarkand. Nevertheless, when he looked at her he was strongly reminded of the far South, of Asia. She must be a half-caste of some kind. He ventured to ask her one day, just before the party, when they had been talking of the arrangements.

She laughed. "Who's been telling you tales, Vanya, my boy? I'm no gipsy. I don't know who my mother was anyhow, and I'm quite sure my mother never knew who my father was!"

But John wasn't to be put off. "Don't you come from Asia, though? Have you never been in Turkestan?"

Her face clouded, her eyes blazed at him. "I tell you I'm no gipsy. What's it to do with you where I come from?"

And there for a time he had to leave it.

The next night was the party.

Nadya was there, Yasha and his friend Michael, the thin, unshaven Jew whom John had first seen in Tientsin, the five other Blue Blouses beside Neura and himself, Nadya's Georgian room-mate and a great many other people whom John had never seen, friends of one or other of the company. The great room barely held them all, magnificent though it was, splendidly furnished with skins, Bokhara carpets, fine pictures. They sang from time to time, one of the unknown guests told anecdotes which set them all in a commotion of laughter, and having thus assumed for a while the rôle of funny man of the party the unknown would depart unnoticed, while another took his place. Some one played a guitar, the Georgian girl danced, they all swayed to the music clapping hands rhythmically, "Aidjah, Kazbek, visoki, Aidjah, Tiflis, dalyoki!" Pavlov was dancing Cossack, a knife between his teeth, to the Georgian girl, then he danced alone, a Caucasian sword dance that glinted dangerous steel from the long daggers all about him. They drank, they ate zakuski, they were merry, they were Russian. From time to time couples could be seen, had there been any one willing to see them, talking amid the uproar as quietly, intimately and unnoticed as though alone in the midst of the forest.

John and Nadya made such an oasis of quiet for themselves.

"Do you like my party?" he asked her happily.

She flashed one of those warm glances at him. "I'm so happy, Vanya, that you're succeeding."

He was buoyant, full of pride in himself, hoping to carry her away on the wave of his success. "Ah, now will you believe in me? Now am I good for something?"

She did not answer, but her glance told him that he had won.

He waved his hand triumphantly at the crowd around him.

"They're happy, I'm happy, and life isn't so bad, Nadya."

She agreed with him that it was not so bad, and then she caught him up, laughing. "Now we'll dance, Vanya, come along and we'll show them. Viktor Grigorich, the guitar," she called to the young man who was nursing it. Pavlov jumped on a table excited.

"Room, comrades, room for Vanya and his girl," he cried. "Silence, citizens, the dance begins!"

And for a wonder they were silent while the guitar throbbed the first notes, then they joined in, beating time, clapping, singing, while John and Nadya danced together, a Russian dance, quick with the sudden joy of spring in the Russian village. They danced, and danced, their eyes sparkling, their faces flushed, their bodies glad, when suddenly the light faded from John's eyes, though his body danced as vigorously as before, and he felt a weight on his heart such as a man might feel who expects arrest for a crime he has not committed. In that crowd about them he felt a pair of heavy eyes on him, heavy dark eyes that burned into him, pierced through into his very heart it seemed, since his gladness fled before their glance. Why was she watching him like that? The dull, hopeless feeling gave way to hot anger and irritation. Nadya, caught close to him and held for a second in the dance, saw it and was troubled. The guitar stopped, they fell into the applauding circle and escaped into a corner.

They were quiet, alone again. He looked at Nadya, and

this time he knew he had only to ask and he had everything. Life would be his from tomorrow.

Then suddenly she was in front of them, that damned gipsy girl, in her black dress with the coloured scarf knotted about her throat.

"Well, Vanya, how's your party?" she asked, in that hoarse mocking voice of hers.

He answered abruptly, knowing that Nadya was looking curiously at her.

"Why, you can see. How could it be better?"

She laughed, and turned away as if contemptuous. "Oh, anything can be better, my boy."

She had gone in a moment, but that moment had spoiled his moment, their moment. She irritated him intensely.

"Who is she?" Nadya asked, interested by the girl's dark beauty and splendid body.

"Nobody knows. If we are to believe her, she doesn't know herself. Like me, she's a stray, a vagabond."

"She's a peasant girl," Nadya said decidedly. "Bodies like that aren't bred in towns."

Neura's beauty was emphatic enough to have destroyed that precious moment between them which John had been ready to clutch at. Her personality had disintegrated it like a ray striking a crystal; shattered it to nothingness. Nadya should have been thinking of him, and instead she thought of her. And John had to confess to himself that until that moment when Neura stood in front of him, he had hardly given a thought to her, that till a week ago he had hardly realized her existence as an individual, capable of affecting others, of coming into their lives and seriously working upon them. Yes, for the first time it struck him that a girl like Neura might come into his life seriously. He would have thrust the thought away, but at that moment Yasha came up, smiling shrewdly and kindly, as usual, and he also, of all people, spoke of her.

"Well, Vanya, you've a double conquest tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the black-eyed beauty has been making eyes at you as though she would eat you. Nadya will have to be on her guard."

Nadya laughed. "If that's true, Yasha, it's Vanya who must be on his guard. He's got a weak heart."

"Is this true, Vanya?" Yasha demanded, accusingly.

"Oh, to hell with the woman," he answered, strangely irritable. "She makes eyes at every one."

"Yes, that's true, for she started making up to me a little while ago," Yasha told them, still smiling. "And I came up because I'm jealous."

John said nothing, but Nadya was interested.

"Really, Yasha? Now, what could she have meant by that?"

"I don't know. I thought Vanya might tell me, but evidently he won't." And Yasha left them. It was curious that this news for the first time made Nadya take her seriously, and that they all assumed she meant something, wanted something. Had they known Neura a little better they would have known that she simply wished to make herself agreeable to Yasha, to test his mettle, and see where she stood, because she knew he was John's friend, and might on occasion advise him.

The party was getting hilarious, several new guests had arrived and old ones departed. Nobody knew who the newcomers were, but they were made at home and in a moment every one behaved as though they had known them all their lives, till they departed, when they were at once forgotten. Singing began again, the noise made talk impossible, and in the general crowd John lost touch with Nadya, till she and the Georgian girl came to say they must go, having to be at work betimes in the morning. He said good-bye unhappily, having no further interest in the

party. He had lost his moment, and must wait now impatiently till he saw her again, which might be soon, and might be nearly a week, according to their work.

CHAPTER III

After that evening John's life began to change. Yasha rarely saw him, for after the theatre he would go out with one or other of the many new acquaintances who now seemed to crowd around him and they generally spent the night with other actors, or cinema workers, and now and then with a sprinkling of dramatists and poets. He was profoundly ignorant, had read nothing, but his wit, his songs and his youth made a way for him. Indeed, in many of the circles he frequented, for his sake they made a virtue of ignorance, talked of the "spontaneous genius" of the people and other such things. When bits of this conversation came back to Yasha he was angry with John.

"Nonsense," he would say, "how can it be good not to read? Why, the Tsar himself would have been delighted with that idea. Your ignorant worker's no damned good to us, my boy, and an ignorant peasant is worse—he's a danger. Why don't you read, go to the university in your spare time?"

John would agree, and do nothing. He stayed out so late, talked so much, drank so much, that for all his strength he had not the energy left to study.

"You'll dry up like a stream on the Kirghiz steppe one day," Yasha warned him. "You can't live for ever on genius if you don't feed it."

Nadya said the same. She herself was studying, hoping to go one day to the university, and she worked twice as hard as John, seven hours in the factory and three or four at classes or meetings nearly every day. In time, to save

argument, he no longer talked about his friends and their ideas, since these two nearly always disagreed violently with them. Then almost unconsciously he found that sometimes he avoided them, so that he might not *feel* their reproaches, for they very rarely said anything, unless he provoked it.

He noticed that Neura was at most of the places he went to. Some of the gatherings were in her room on the Arbat. When he protested that he was tired, that he would go home, she over-ruled him, chaffing, and the others supported her. So it usually ended that he went.

One night, after all the others had left her room, she asked him to stay for a while and talk. He hesitated a moment, then consented, for he had begun to find something powerfully attractive in this silent, noble-limbed girl with the burning eyes. Some kindred vagabond strain in her appealed to him.

She poured out wine for him and laughed, showing small, even white teeth that flashed between lips which needed no rouge.

"Here you are at last, Vanka. Now, tell me, don't you like my place?"

"It's fine, but it must cost you something."

"Not a bit of it. The rent's only twenty roubles a month, and none of this junk that you see is mine." She waved a brown, expressive little hand at the rich furnishings. "It belonged to some old bourgeois who's hopped it over the frontier, good luck to him!"

"They tell me queer things about you, Neura." Since he was alone with her, he thought he might as well find out something, see how far she could be probed.

"Such as?" she asked lightly.

"That you aren't particular whom you go with, that you never stop with any one long enough for them to take breath, that you are only trying now to worm a cinema

engagement out of some one and then leave us, that—Or have I said enough?"

"No, go on. I like to hear how I am appreciated."

"Well, they say that you are a gipsy, that you come from Turkestan, that you can't remember the day you first sinned, but that it was probably with the pope who gave you your first communion, that—but isn't that enough?"

"It is if you don't know any more."

He confessed. "I don't."

"It's funny how true most of it is, nearly all but the pope. God be praised I never sinned with one of them."

He laughed. "It's comforting to know you recognize some virtues."

"And you?" she asked quickly. "Are you an authority on virtue, my beardless boy?"

"I know it, unhappily, when I see it, but my cursed vagabondage keeps me from it."

"So you're a vagabond? I've heard things, too, and that is one of them. I've heard you're half an Indian and ran away from America in a ship. Is that true?"

"Not quite," and he told her the story of his wanderings in brief outline, without names. At the mention of certain places he thought he saw a kind of repressed shudder shake her. Could it be that this Neura and the other were the same, after all? He mentioned one name, Kireiev, a Cossack. There could be no mistake, she changed colour, ever so slightly, and those eyes blazed at him suddenly. She knew now that he knew.

"Won't you tell me your story?" he asked, trying to speak lightly.

She stood up abruptly. "No, I won't. My life interests no one, not even myself. Besides, it's time for you to go, little boy. Four o'clock."

She affected this half-contemptuous way of calling him "boy," and using Vanka instead of Vanya. It did not

trouble him now, though at first he had been irritated, when everything she said or did had irritated him.

As he was going she shot a question at him.

"I suppose you've got a girl, Vanka?"

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, one likes to know about one's friends. That would be her at the party here, the strong, fair-haired girl?"

"That's her."

"Well, good night." She yawned, one hand before her mouth. He turned and went, quickly, walking home unhappily through cold, snowbound streets. Why had she spoken of Nadya? It was deliberate. Everything she did was deliberate. Could it have been she wanted him to be pitting the images of the pair of them against one another, tormenting himself with a choice? He shut both images from his mind and trudged home, empty, cold and dispirited. And this, had he known, was just what she had wished—that he should put both from his mind, so that one might come back with doubled force.

After that night he tried to keep away from her, and on the Sunday went ski-ing at Sokolniki with Nadya. They enjoyed the day, but when the time came that he must go to the theatre he felt he had got no farther, that the moment when he could approach her with an open heart was no nearer, and he parted from her wretched. John's was no temperament to sulk or brood, if he was checked he must find an outlet in some form of violent action, so he went to the parties again, and drank, and behaved madly. To avoid Neura was impossible and within a week he was back at her flat with a miscellaneous crowd of kino actresses, novelists, theatrical producers, Communist dramatists, and their own people led by Pavlov. They talked, sang, danced, drank and jested broadly with Neura, half of them slaves to her beauty. John was beginning to be attracted by them. They were all so young, so

full of ideas, so nimble-witted, passionate and happy, or so they seemed to his ignorance.

That night they drank a great deal; it was bitterly cold outside, but the chief cause was Nikitin, the big, fair-haired poet. He was not much in sympathy with their circle, or indeed, with any circle, but came because he was madly in love with Neura. Peasant-born, a mystic of the earth, famous even before the Revolution, he made himself a reputation for eccentricity, since he could find no solid base for his life. He drank like a fish, sobbed much, was violent and unhappy, yet at other times as boisterous as a peasant boy at a drinking-bout. Since he could not wear out his great frame, he hanged himself in a hotel at Odessa. But that was long afterward.

He was in a boisterous mood that night, and kept them all drinking. He would take no refusal, and none dared refuse, for his hand was heavy and ill-disciplined. So John drank also, drank too much, felt dazed and unwell, and staggered to a divan. He slept amid the soft, barbaric cushions, and when he woke it was out of a dream, a dream that he was lying in a sea-cave and a witch with wine-dark eyes was standing over him.

It was half-lit in the still room, for they had all gone, and in fact, the witch was standing over him, a slender golden-brown column that bent down and kissed his eyelids so that fire ran through him. Then with a lithe movement she was by his side, and his arms of their own will were round her. "Neura," he murmured drowsily.

CHAPTER IV

IN the afternoon he left her, still drunk with beauty, a heaviness in his head, dullness in his limbs. The bitter cold struck him like a blow as he came into the street

and he stepped back for a moment behind the shelter of the door, for the icy wind cut round the corner of the street ferociously. There was a strange stillness, no trams running, the people hurrying by in little crowds, talking excitedly, or standing despite the cold in little mournful groups, as though waiting. Had something happened? He saw red banners draped with black hanging from a house opposite, and stepping out into the street, he saw that the grey, frostbound monotony of the houses and shops had flowered suddenly into red and black as far as he could see.

He heard the words floating along the street. "Ilyich, yesterday at Gorki." "Lenin died yesterday." "Ilyich, Ilyich." As he walked along the words came up and buffeted him like a reproach, stung him as though they had frozen into lumps of ice as they left the mouths of the speakers. The whole great city had only one thought, one phrase. "Ilyich is dead," and the red and black flags drooped over the cold pavements, a trail of blood through the city.

He tried to think of Neura, of her warm embrace, and could not. Instead he was forced to remember Nadya. The factory across the river would have stopped work, there would be a meeting, and perhaps she was speaking. Nadya, his Nadya. What had he done that night? He had better tell her, and then maybe it would be all over for ever. No, he didn't want that, he loved her, he couldn't part with her. And Neura, what of her? A woman he hardly knew, not a comrade like Nadya, but beautiful, so beautiful. The memory of the night came back and choked him so that he stopped irresolute, the cold wind whipping about his legs. Which was it to be? He would have to choose between them now, and he walked on towards the river, towards Nadya, trying to reason out that which had no reason.

He found himself at the great brick barracks where Nadya lived, and climbed up the black stone stairs, went along the bare limewashed corridors with their innumerable doors. He knocked, she called out and he entered.

She was standing at the end of the bed, alone.

"Vanya! You have heard, of course? I have just come from the meeting of the workers in our factory. It is terrible. Many of them wept, old men and women, crying like little children. What shall we do without him?"

He sat down, dispirited, unhappy. For a time they talked about Lenin, and then their talk flagged and they were sitting silent.

"Nadya—"

"What is it? What's the matter, Vanya?"

He told her. As she listened she blushed, but said nothing, gave no sign till he had finished.

Some girls, John knew, would have heard his story with seeming indifference, and said, "Well, and are you happy? Do you love her? I'm glad you've found some one," affecting to forget all that had previously passed between them, to pretend it was a mere friendship, and ending all up with, "At least I hope we shall still be good friends." Nadya was not that kind. She knew that between them was something more than mere friendship, and she could not pretend otherwise. Nevertheless, she could not repress a desire to punish him for his too easy unfaith.

"Why have you rushed to tell me this, Vanya, as though it were a crime?"

He looked at her, saw he could speak freely, and said vehemently, "Because it is a crime. Because you and I, Nadya, might have made something better of life. But I could never speak, I wasn't good enough for you, we drifted, and now this has happened."

"Don't say things like that. It wasn't a question of being good enough. It was whether you and I would

make a success of things, whether we could live together, that's why I never said 'yes.'"

"I know. And once you were on the point of saying it, when *she* came up and spoiled everything."

"You mean at your party?"

"Yes, then." He was delighted that she knew, though neither of them had spoken a word on that occasion. It confirmed all his violent thoughts about Neura, for now, in the reaction after her presence, he did feel violent. "Yes, just when you would have agreed. We could have married, this wouldn't have happened."

She got up and walked to the little window, looking out into the desolate frozen courtyard below. "Wouldn't it?" she asked, almost of herself. "Suppose Neura hadn't come then and stopped me, was it all right? Should we have been happy? Should we, Vanya?" She turned round and faced him. "Should we?"

He knew that she was thinking of these last weeks when he had neglected her, gone drinking with those fools, given Neura every chance. "Maybe not, Nadya, the fact is you've been mistaken in me. I never could settle down like other people. I'm cursed from birth, I think. There's that in my blood that cuts me off from decent people and makes me a vagabond."

He spoke bitterly, and she was affected by his bitterness. For a moment a rush of tenderness nearly got the better of her, but she checked herself in time.

"I suppose it's true, Vanya, that between you and me nothing could ever have happened that was really good. So maybe we ought to part. Yet, all the same, I love you, and if anything hurt you I should be sorry, terribly sorry."

He laughed. "Hurt me! No, I've not sunk to relying on others to heal my hurts, Nadya. I can still look after myself, and if I go down, I go alone and without regret.

Don't you bother about me. I'm a fool in many ways, but I'm not afraid of being hurt." And strangely enough he spoke the truth. It was his chief virtue, his pride.

She knew it, and admired it. "But all the same, Vanya, I'm ready if anything happens, to help all I can."

"Damn it!" he cried, "why should anything happen? Are you afraid of that woman? I'm not."

"No," she said simply, "I'm afraid of you."

He laughed again, at her and at his own outburst. "Perhaps you're right."

"You see, I do know something about you, Vanya. I haven't been your friend for nothing."

He looked at her gratefully, in that moment he nearly begged for mercy, to be given a chance. He would have broken himself if it would have helped. He felt strong enough. Then he told himself not to be a fool. A broken man is no man.

"Well, don't forget we have been friends, Nadya. *I* shan't, fool though I am. Now, since no good can come of us two together, as you say, good-bye!" He held out his hand.

She took it. "And let no worse come of our parting—good-bye, my dear. . . ."

The days after he left Nadya were a dream to John. In Moscow everything was stopped for the lying-in-state and funeral of Lenin. All the theatres were closed and he did not see Neura, save on one occasion when their troupe marched to the Dom Soiyusov to pay their tribute to the dead leader. And even then he did not see her, for they were no longer individuals in that great sea of people, all with one mind, one direction.

They came out into the street in the afternoon with their black-draped banner, just before dark, but it was almost ten before they got into the Ohotny Ryad, near to

the great hall where the body lay in state; six hours to march a mile!

It seemed the whole nation was in the streets. From everywhere, from each side-street, from every square, came the dark masses of men and women with their floating banners, their mournful bands. Here and there a mounted militia-man directed the crowd, but not a horse, not a vehicle besides. Only the people, the dark-clothed people with their scarlet banners, filling every street, trudging over the hard, frozen snow through the bitter cold to look their last on their leader.

The cold air echoed with music, the long, haunting strains of the funeral march.

> You lived for the workers. In life you were one
> Whose love knew no stint, whom no fears could appal;
> And now you have died for the Cause that you loved;
> We greet you who gave to the people your all.

He caught the glare of an electric lamp from time to time as it fell on a waving banner: "The Workers of the Uritzky factory!"; "The Soldiers of the Tenth Samara Cavalry Division!"; and the brave slogans, the calls for unity, for common action against the enemies of the workers. From the crowd in the mourning streets rose a long murmur, from the shuffling of their feet over the frozen roads rose a slow music. And still from all sides they came with draped banners and sad, triumphant strains, the dark hosts of workers marching to their leader.

Their own little band was mixed now with those before and behind them. His eyes caught a fresh banner as they were halted by the militia and the head of another long procession passed. "Under the banner of the Comintern!" The workers from the Comintern passed by, Russians, Jews, a group of Englishmen, Germans, every nation, even Chinese, Indians and Mongols were among them. He

saw Yasha walking beside Michael. The procession headed by the Comintern workers was a long one, but when it had passed their own fell in behind and they turned into the Square of the Revolution, a broad and silent space, with a black stream of people winding over the snow to the tall white portico there on the left, on the corner of Sverdlovsk Square.

The air was full of music and the workers hummed the words softly as they approached the hall.

> Now tyranny fades, for the new day has dawned,
> Exultant, the workers arise in their might.
> Dead comrade, farewell; you have gone to the rest
> Well earned by the part that you played in the fight.

They filed through the high columned hall, beneath the flittering crystal candelabra, hushed, weeping softly, to where the red bier stood amid the evergreens, his comrades standing watch with bowed heads, the soldiers at attention, the funeral music, always the music. For two days and two nights the people passed through, an unending stream, to look at the calm, bearded face, to see for the last time with the sorrow of great love the little wrinkles round the eyes that were closed for ever. Their Ilyich, Leader, Comrade. . . .

The day of the funeral, the coldest within living memory, great fires burning at the street corners tended by soldiers, where the frozen people could take pause to warm themselves as they marched towards the Red Square. The Square of the Revolution, Sverdlovsk Square, cut off by cordons of mounted militia-men. Outside the cordons, in the streets, the people factory by factory, institution by institution, each with their banners, but with no bands today, thousands upon thousands of workers, filling the streets of their city, the shuffle of their feet, the sad murmur of their voices making his funeral-march from one

end of the city to the other. Down every street the banners floating over the dark, marching people, now red like wounds, now like the sudden flame of flowers.

Inside the Square, silence. The unutterable sadness of Chopin's Funeral March from a hidden orchestra. But otherwise absolute silence, the soldiers on their horses, the long lines of infantry motionless and quiet, while always from outside rose the murmur of a great multitude.

Then across the quiet square the soldiers began to move, there was a rhythmical clatter of hooves on the frozen cobbles as the lancers rode forward a few paces, then a halt, and silence. Once more the clatter of hooves, the halt and silence, clatter, silence, clatter, silence, repeated till the Red Square was reached, and his grave. Over the great space floats the thin sound of human voices as his comrades make the funeral speeches, then the boom of guns, and he is laid to rest. A long sigh from many thousands, but they do not go yet, and for days after they are still marching by, lowering their red banners in salute, as they pass the tomb, men and women from all over Russia. They march by continuously, peasants in yellow sheepskins, with rime on their yellow beards and red, frost-bitten cheeks; Kirghiz, Caucasians, Uzbegs, Mongols, all the ancient races of Asia; men and women pouring through the Square till you had thought the world was emptied of men.

CHAPTER V

DURING this time John saw nothing of Neura, but when everything was over, when life with its meetings, rehearsals, performances, became normal again, he found that he had to go back to her, that now he had left Nadya nothing else had any attraction for him, any interest.

The first night he went to her room among the usual crowd there was a stranger, a plump Englishman, well-dressed, in black clothes, a stiff white collar round his thick neck, a man with shrewd wrinkles at the corners of his little blue eyes, a man with a close-clipped brown moustache, overful, smiling lips. "My friend, Mister Whitehead," Neura introduced him, ludicrously mispronouncing the difficult English name.

Whitehead spoke no Russian and attached himself to John for the evening.

"I saw you play the other night," he told him.

"And how did you like it?" John asked, slightly bored.

"Very well. The Russians have the sense of drama born in them. Look at Lenin's funeral, a great mass drama, every single one of those hundreds of thousands of people acting a part. I have never seen anything like it."

"And you won't again. Not even when the leader of the English Revolution, dies."

Whitehead laughed, showing his strong, large teeth. "I'm not likely to see that day. I can't understand you people who imagine that there could ever be a Bolshevist Revolution in the West."

"Too cultured, I suppose?" asked John.

"Yes, too cultured and too free. You would never get a Western worker to face all the dirt and mess that the Revolution has made here."

"I suppose you wouldn't agree that it might be something else besides the Revolution that made the dirt and mess in Russia?"

"I'm willing to admit it if you like. I am a business man and a scientist. In 1920 I came here and found all the talent of Russia, musicians, men of science, writers, half-starved in a desolate, unwarmed communal house in Petrograd, looked after by Maxim Gorki, himself a sick

and broken man. That's what revolution does. And at the same time I met Lenin in his room at the Kremlin, full of dreams of a great industrial Russia, of electrification, of new cities, and all around him an ash heap, nothing else, from which the people were desperately trying to rake out a few scraps of machinery. The dreamer of the Kremlin!"

"You really think he was only a dreamer then, that hundreds of thousands of people have marched through this bitter cold to mourn a dreamer?"

"Yes, he was a magnificent dreamer. To think that your Bolsheviks imagine that we in the West should fly to that same ash heap for the sake of a dream! I am a man of affairs, young man, and I know that we are trying to organize industry today as never in all its existence it has been organized before. We practical men, we scientists, are making a revolution beside which your bloody and wasteful upheaval in Russia will pale into insignificance. And we are doing it without violence, without recourse to destruction."

"I see. Yet I seem to have heard of a million unemployed and much suffering and discontent in England?"

"The pangs of birth, that is all."

Neura came up to them with Valitzky, one of the writers who sometimes frequented her circle, a pale, tragic man of middle age, pince-nez on his high-bridged nose, a heavy moustache covering his sensitive, suffering mouth.

"Mister Whitehead is also a writer, Valitzky. You must talk to him." Whitehead smiled up at her, his eyes appraising her beauty. Valitzky bowed gravely. "I have heard of him, Neura. We are honoured by your presence, sir. I hear you arguing about our Revolution."

"Yes, Ivan Ivanich here is a Bolshevik. I am trying to convince him that in the West we are wiser and more civilized, that we are making a different kind of Revolution, we great capitalists and men of science."

Valitzky sat down beside him. "Yes, I know the argument. Indeed, I have read your books."

"You agree, or not?"

"No, I do not agree, and I am far from being a Bolshevik. During the last years I have suffered, suffered so horribly that at times I thought I must lose my reason. Yet I recognize the Revolution was inevitable, that it is inevitable with you also. Our civilization is decayed, weary, amorous of death, and the barbarian hordes are going to sweep us away as the Romans were swept away. Your ideas, of you and men like Stinnes, like Ford, have no hope of stemming the flood. If you will excuse me, I think that what you are attempting is worse than Bolshevism, that, though it is possible you might feed and clothe the masses, though you might even abolish war, you have no aim, no ideal, that your structure would be soulless. Millions of mechanical men and women producing to keep a few in luxury, the deadly barrier of class still firmly in being, a kind of highly organized Chicago, spread across the earth. No, better death than that."

"I think you do us less than justice."

"Perhaps, yet that is how it strikes me. Here in Russia I have seen unspeakable horror; rather than endure it again I would kill myself now, but I had the choice of leaving, of an honoured exile with you, and I stayed. Nevertheless, I confess that I am dead here. We intellectuals have no place. I preferred that death to life in the West."

"Certainly, it must be death for you, no freedom, an end to liberty in thought and speech."

"You are mistaken. I have full freedom. My novel, *The Death of Society,* contains such bitter things about Bolshevism that had it said the same of British capitalism probably no publisher in England would have taken it. Yet here it is published, widely read and bitterly attacked. We

are all free to write the truth as we see it. The censorship only affects the conscious liars and mischief-makers."

They continued to talk, Whitehead's eyes roaming off every now and then to follow Neura as she roamed about the room. At last the party began to break up. He said good-bye to John.

"Would you mind helping me tomorrow?" he asked him. "I am visiting a prison and would like an unofficial interpreter."

John consented. They all went away and he was alone again with Neura. . . .

John met Whitehead the next morning at the Bolshaya Moskovskaya Hotel, and they drove out to the prison in a closed car, over roads that bumped them to the roof, at a pace that almost shook the breath from their bodies.

"What a country!" groaned Whitehead. "And you think it is going to be civilized? Never." His head bumped the roof.

"What do you want to see a prison for?" asked John.

"I—I don't know. Every one who comes to Russia—wants—to see—a prison," he gasped, as they bumped over a particularly bad stretch of road.

"They must be damned queer people who come here," was John's comment.

"Why? It's a healthy morbidity. We've read so much about atrocities that we must have something to feed our eyes on when we come to Russia. Besides, every one has read *Crime and Punishment,* and we want to see a real Russian prison with tortured consciences, and all the rest of it."

"You're welcome."

The car sped along a street of barracks, on to a treeless, snow-covered plain, where rose the tall bulk of the prison. There was no carriage road, and they were forced to walk

the last few yards. "Thank God," sighed Whitehead, stretching his legs.

A gang of prisoners was shovelling snow outside the open gate, a blue-uniformed warder standing near. They looked curiously at the two visitors, and John felt a strange discomfort, as though he were intruding on some one's privacy, as though he were going with dishonest purpose into a convent of nuns. Inside the gate was a long, neglected three-storied building, many of the windows broken. A child was wandering outside, and John asked him for the commandant's office. "Upstairs," he said, and pointed to an open door.

They went up the cold stone staircase, pushed open one or two doors only to see empty rooms with broken floorboards. A peasant woman saw them and took them down to the door they needed. It opened on a little office where a girl sat at a table with many printed forms in front of her, checking up details and filling them in with violet ink. A pile of letters addressed to prisoners lay on the table. Behind her was a big cupboard, the door open, where evidently the files were kept. From another room came the click of a typewriter.

She looked up at them. "Kolya," she cried, and a young man came out of the inner room, in warder's uniform.

"You are the visitors?" he asked. "Come in, and I will fetch the commandant."

They sat down and waited, opposite a large, signed portrait of Trotsky.

Presently the commandant arrived, a burly, fresh-complexioned man, with a short, fair moustache, a long stride and a stoop. He welcomed them genially, though John felt that the geniality was assumed and that in his heart he didn't like being bothered, and then led them off into the prison telling a string of little anecdotes. The young man, a lively fellow with a quick, springy step and fine white

teeth, came with them to open gates and doors. In the yard some twoscore prisoners were exercising, smoking, talking, walking round, a young soldier with a rifle and bayonet standing guard at the gate. The same curious, half-hostile look met them. "If I were a prisoner I'd feel like strangling any visitor who came poking his nose at me," John thought. Whitehead was plying the commandant with questions as they passed through the workshops, and the latter, proud of his prison, was replying expansively. A gentle-eyed, middle-aged, decent-looking man, who was in charge of the weaving-shed, spoke to Whitehead in German.

"I am a German," he said.

"Yes," interrupted the commandant. "He is a German, one of the best workers we have."

"Why are you here?" Whitehead inquired.

"Murder," he answered. "I have served four years and have six more yet. Unless the commandant decides otherwise," and he looked at him and smiled.

John felt his stomach turn. Murder! A quiet workman, a real German, whom you would only expect to see with his wife and family, reading text-books on Social Democracy.

"Yes," said the commandant, smiling back. "In the R.S.F.S.R. we have no death penalty and the maximum sentence is ten years, which the authorities may shorten on my recommendation, if a prisoner has proved himself a good man."

When they were out of earshot he added, "Often they do not serve half their sentence. If a man shows he is likely to be a good citizen, why keep him shut up here?"

They went on from shed to shed, the commandant telling of all the reforms he had introduced. Whitehead tried to discover if anything in the nature of psychological treatment was given by doctors. But evidently the commandant did not understand anything of psycho-analysis.

"Yes, we have a doctor, he examines the prisoners regularly." Then he told them more of himself, how he had been a non-commissioned officer in the old army, a member of the Party since 1903, and during the Civil War commander of a brigade. "It was I who captured and shot Colonel Muraviev."

They went into the prison itself, tier upon tier of cells rising up, stone galleries with iron railings running along each tier.

"They're all the same," the commandant said. "Do you want to see each tier?"

"No."

"Then choose, please, and we will examine a few cells."

Whitehead chose the second tier and they went up, looking into the cells, each exactly the same, two beds, a little table, a mirror, sometimes a few books, a zinc washing-bowl and tap fixed to the wall.

"Here we have two political prisoners." He opened the door and two men stood up to receive them, one pale, bearded, with pince-nez, a man of about thirty, the other small and round, thin black hair on his head, two lively black eyes in his face, dark complexioned, middle-aged.

"Do you wish to speak to them alone? I will go."

The little man spoke. "Why go, commandant? We have nothing to conceal from you. You may hear everything. We are not afraid to speak before you." The tall man with the golden beard said nothing, his lips were parted ever so slightly, rather ironically, and he held a book in one hand.

The small man spoke rapidly. "Our treatment is perfectly correct. I am sure that the Soviet prisons are better than the Tsar's prisons. My only complaint is that we do not have the privileges of political prisoners and are compelled to live with criminals, but that is the fault of our judges, not of our jailer. I am a Georgian, a general, and I have a right to full political treatment."

The other prisoner spoke in monosyllables. The scorn in his voice was terrible. "I am a student. No, I have nothing to complain of. Prison is prison, what more can one say?" John put him down as a Social Democrat.

They left the cell. "Strictly speaking, they were not sentenced as political prisoners, but I do my best for them. They have no manual work, and their only task is to teach the illiterate prisoners to read and write."

John felt the general had been eager to curry favour, hoping for a remission of sentence, and that the tall, bitter student might have spoken a great deal, not in complaint, but in anger. They went to the Co-operative, to the barber's, to the chapel which was now converted into a theatre, library and cinema. Then they came to the tiny hospital, with its half-dozen truckle-beds. There was only one occupant, a man with a haggard, bearded face. When John saw him his heart stopped for a second, the blood rushed to his head. It was Shurin.

The commandant was explaining that the windowless room at the back had been a punishment cell, now converted by him into a bathroom for the hospital. A smell of disinfectant hung about the room. Shurin was staring at John, unable to believe his eyes, but at last he spoke.

"What the devil are you doing here, Vanya? Walking about like a commissar? Why, you ought to be inside one of these cells."

"I am guiding the Englishman. But why are you here, Mihael Leonidich? What has happened?"

"Happened? Injustice has happened!" He sat up in the bed, thin and scraggy, indignant. "I am here for the crime of other men, or for the crime of being an honest Socialist. Injustice! What else can you expect in this 'Socialist' Republic?"

Whitehead was watching him with interest, not understanding, but feeling that perhaps here at last he had come

upon an example of Soviet unrighteousness. The commandant came back from the bathroom door astonished.

"Do you know him then?" he asked John. "He is incorrigible, the most difficult prisoner we have, always complaining because he is not lodged in a Moscow hotel or made President of the Republic for his crime."

"Do not insult me!" Shurin cried. "Isn't it enough to be in this lousy hole for seven years without having to endure your taunts? You're only a slave of the Bolsheviks, a hired torturer, and I won't talk to you. I am going to speak to these people in English, which an ignorant man won't understand."

The commandant smiled. "As you please. They can judge for themselves."

John turned to explain to him. "This man was my guardian in America and brought me to Siberia. We would like to talk to him for a while."

"Please! There can be no objection," and he called the sanitary orderly to discuss some detail of administration, while John and Whitehead spoke with Shurin.

"Who is your friend, John? Are you a man of influence in England, sir?" Shurin asked Whitehead.

The latter smiled, all his shrewdness awake, lest he be asked to perform something difficult or unpleasant for this haggard freak. "My name is William Whitehead. I am a scientist and writer."

"I know you!" Shurin exclaimed excitedly. "The millionaire Socialist. Your name is a household word in the United States, which is the one civilized country in the world. I was a fool to leave it. But I will tell you my case, and you will rouse the conscience of the West against this black injustice. Six months ago I was arrested at night by soldiers of the G.P.U. and put on trial for embezzlement—I, Shurin, a man with whom honesty is a religion! I was a specialist in a metal factory and with me were

arrested the director and three others. It may be that they were guilty of the crimes charged to them, I don't know. Anyway, the director was a Communist, so very likely they were. But as certain as justice will one day be done, I am innocent. I was accused because I am a Socialist, an opponent of Bolshevist tyranny, and my imprisonment is nothing but a political frame-up. I was even sentenced to death, but I dared them to execute that sentence! I defied them! I told them they were seeking a means to rid themselves of one who always believed in honesty and truth, and they were afraid to kill me. My sentence was commuted to seven years' imprisonment with loss of Civil rights. You will look into my case, sir? John here will vouch for my character, he will tell you that I was forced to leave America because of a similar political persecution, because their capitalists did not like my fearless spirit. You will intercede? You will?"

Whitehead hastened to reassure him. "Certainly. If any injustice has been done I will use what influence I have, though I am afraid it is very little."

"And you, John? Remember how tenderly I cared for you as a child. For the sake of my poor dead wife, who cannot help me now, do what you can."

The man's hypocrisy irritated John, but he had no wish to be unkind. "I am nobody, Mihael Leonidich, but I will see if anything can be done." He was impatient to go. Shurin reminded him of too many things.

Whitehead was equal to the occasion. With genial kindness he held out his hand. "Well, Mr. Shurin, you're in a tragic position, and if I had time I would stay, but I have an appointment with some influential friends which I mustn't miss. Whatever I can I will do."

"Thank you, thank you. I have read your books. I know you will fight for the truth. Good-bye. Good-bye,

Vanya. Don't forget me." He slid down into the bed again, a haggard, bearded face on the white pillow, communing with himself.

They went out with relief. "Come on," John urged. "I shall be glad to get out of this place," and they went, the smiling commandant explaining to the last his virtues and his troubles, insisting that they sign the visitors' book and begging them to pay him a visit two years later, when the prison would be a model to the world.

"Phew!" said Whitehead, as they got back into the car. "I hate these people who try to make out that a prison is a very good substitute for a convalescent home. Their ideas are right, but the thing is rotten from the bottom. It's like planting shrubs and flowers in a sewage bed."

"You wanted to come," John reminded him.

"Yes. We hear so much at home about prisons in Russia. You might think the damned places were the basis of society, the fuss that's made over them. Well, I've done my duty, and at least I have got a stick to beat that fool Macdonald with, next time I meet him at dinner."

John laughed. "I didn't realize the visit was personal."

"Oh, don't be so damned cute, my boy. I can't help it if I dislike that queer, vain simulacrum of a statesman. But tell me about Master Shurin. I thought I had a genuine atrocity, till I discovered he was a relation of yours. Then I knew that he must be imprisoned justly."

And John told him who Shurin was, and of their life in America.

CHAPTER VI

EVERY one of the Blue Blouses knew now of his affair with Neura. Pavlov even congratulated him ironically.

"Citizen Vanya, you have my best wishes. So young

and yet so victorious! Already they tell me you have had her for three times as long as my miserable self, to wit, three weeks!"

"Three weeks and three days, Nikolai Petrovich," he corrected him gravely.

"So! Why, it's almost a marriage. We must be getting ready for a Blue Blouse christening."

"At least," said John, "I'm keeping her in the troupe," referring to the notorious fact that Neura's amours were generally directed to securing a better job.

Pavlov laughed outright. "O innocence, O youth! Three weeks and three days, said you? Believe me, not three minutes and three seconds. Our Neura stop job hunting because of you! How little you know her. I am no chicken" (he was thirty), "but though I did have the blissful privilege for but seven days, which is but one hundred and sixty-eight hours, or ten thousand and eighty minutes (every one sheer rapture, I assure you), and an incalculable number of seconds, I did learn, without bitterness, being an unprejudiced man, that so many seconds, minutes, hours and days could never be filled in Neura's life by one man alone, however worthy."

John blushed, which was a rare occurrence. "Yet she is still in the troupe," he said, as being at once the best justification of his manhood and her good faith.

The gibes of his fellow-workers were not the only irritation John had to bear. Neura herself did her best to exasperate him. She jested about their relation before the others quite openly, and only his own ready tongue silenced her when once he got over the shock of it. Then he gave her as good back in her own coin.

Yet she could be tender when she wished and John suspected that he was favoured beyond others because of his knowledge of her past. Only once did she refer to this, in the quiet of her splendid room on the Arbat, which she

used as despitefully as though it were its former bourgeois proprietor and not simply his innocent image.

"Did you know old Kireiev and Andrei Sergeivich well?" she asked him.

He told her, as well as one can know men after being with them for weeks on end upon the steppes.

"I'd like to know what Andrusha told you about me. No, don't tell me." She stopped him with a wave of her hand. "It would be something like this, 'I was lonely, she was lovely, so we mated. She slept with the young Cossacks, and when she drove me distracted so that I beat her, she lied to the police to get me imprisoned. Then she took money to go away to Moscow. I was well quit of her and hope her next lover may strangle her. Now I can dream in peace of the beautiful lady I wooed and lost.' Isn't that it? Wasn't that the story he told you?"

John laughed at her viciousness and her nearness to the truth, which was, nevertheless, just this side injustice. "It was like that, and yet not quite like that," he admitted. "I don't think Andrusha is quite the fool you want him to appear. Besides, wasn't it a dirty slut's trick to play on any man, to say you were with child by him, as you did?"

She frowned, and her eyes darkened. "I am a slut. But, by God, I'd sooner be beaten to death than have a child by him! And they might have known it, the whole crowd of them. More fools they to believe me. No, I've no regrets with regard to him. What did he take me for in the first place, out there on an island? Was it for a wife, to make him children to delight us both? No, he did it for sin. He was my first man, but many's the girl he'd played the devil with before me."

"But why did you let him? He says you came willingly enough."

"And so I did, to escape old Kireiev. I knew. I had watched them both when the spring came, seen them cast-

ing eyes at me, sneaking after me when I went to bathe. Two men on an island with a young girl before them every day. Oh, I knew what was coming to me, and of the two I preferred Andrusha to the old Cossack. You see, I'd never known Andrusha before, but I'd lived in Kireiev's house ever since I could remember and I knew him through and through, him and his doxies. I wasn't going to be one if I bit his throat through."

John was silent. He was wondering what was the fever in her blood that destroyed her peace. She broke the silence remarkably, as though she guessed what he was thinking.

"Men, they're all the same, all wanting the same thing from a girl. So I give it them, and make them pay for it. What do I care for any of you, you included?" She jumped up, tearing off the thin vest she was wearing. "Look at me, look at these breasts, these thighs, they belong to a peasant girl, and not to you or any of those that get pleasure from them. What are they for, you fool? Not for your delight when you sin, but to make a child from this body, to help another life grow within it. You, all of you, are beasts, svorlochi, svorlochi!"

She flung herself down on the divan, her body trembling, her face buried in the pillow. In a moment she sat up again, laughing, half bitterly, half scornfully.

"Do you fancy yourself as a father, little Vanka, do you, do you?"

He did not answer, watching her, astonished, stirred to the depths of him by feelings he had never known before.

"Very well, my dear, you needn't answer. Strong though you are, my boy, I could kill you if I wished, and I don't choose you for husband. I want a man, a man, I tell you."

"There are many," he said at last.

"There is only one, my husband, and I haven't found him. Oh, your Andrusha has played me a pretty trick, the whining, dreamy, bourgeois eunuch. Oh, you may well

start, but he is. I found that out that he can't have children, he's rotten, his father was rotten, the whole crowd of them are rotten. And if I had had a child by him I would have strangled it at birth, I swear I would."

"Why have you told me all this?"

"I don't know. Because like me, you're an outcast and you can never have what you want. Because you knew them and they had told you something."

She got up, pulled on a dressing-wrap, and lit a cigarette, lapsing into her usual brooding silence. John sat by her, as he did so often, not caring whether she spoke or not, fascinated by the heavy, languorous body, that quickened with such eagerness from time to time. He had never heard her talk so much before, for she was an unusually silent woman, whether because she had little to say or because she despised useless speech was a moot point with those who knew her. Now John realized that the cause was that she was a peasant, one of a race of few words, and moreover brought up as a servant girl in the house of a Cossack, where speech from the women was generally either the result or the cause of blows. People in Moscow knew little enough of Neura, he reflected. He wondered what was her real surname, and why she had chosen Gurevich in its place. He could not take his eyes away from her, and he realized with something like shame that he had quite forgotten Nadya, that the sheer physical presence of this women who would throw him aside like an old clout was becoming a necessity to him. Whenever the thought of that inevitable parting came to him he felt a great rage beating up in his heart. Why should she? Was it right that a woman should make a fool of him and chuck him aside when he wanted her, couldn't do without her? Decidedly it wasn't, and then he would be brought suddenly back from such gloomy, angry thoughts by a few words of hers, and that laugh, so deep and rather hoarse.

He was far from happy. He wanted to be with her always, but she would not have it, told him often that she could not see him, that she was going out, and he wasn't needed. Then they quarrelled, quarrels that she took good care one or other of their comrades should hear and tease him with afterwards. John was strong as a young horse, but he was only a boy in years and this wore on his growing nerves like acid on steel.

About this time he began to see a great deal of William Whitehead.

The square, rather portly figure, with the tanned face, the shrewd eyes, the brown hair and moustache, were always before him. The reason was clear enough. Whitehead was desperately in love with Neura. John did not mind that. Indeed, he seldom thought of it, and when he did it was only with a kind of weary disgust. One day when Yasha was out, Whitehead came up to his room, and after a few indifferent remarks, turned the conversation on to her.

"Neura is a remarkably beautiful woman, John."

"She is. In one way there isn't another woman in Russia as beautiful."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean for sheer wild vitality and physical perfection. She's a peasant girl from Turkestan, with God knows what mixture of blood in her. I've heard her story, the true one, I mean, which is even more remarkable than the rumours."

"Tell it me."

He did tell it, in detail, wondering what the effect would be on Whitehead. As for Whitehead, he leaned back in his chair, smoking the Havana cigar, of which he had brought a supply from England, completely inscrutable. When John had finished he said nothing for a while, and finally turned his bright, shrewd eyes on him.

"You know her very well, don't you? Better than most of us who go there?"

John laughed. "I don't know. It needs more than me to tell who does know her and who doesn't. You can get no truth out of Neura. She tells you unblushingly that she hardly knows a man when he has been her lover for a month, or that she knows some one intimately she has never spoken to."

"So." He withdrew the cigar, puffed out a cloud of blue smoke. "All women are liars. They are natural animals, vain, unscrupulous towards men. Neura's great attraction is that she is an even more natural animal than the majority of her sex. A peasant girl, you say. Yet no one would know it today, but for that magnificent body which certainly was never bred in towns. She has learned quickly. All women can learn little things quickly. It's only the big things they can't tackle." The cigar, with its long, white ash went back between his lips.

"You really think so? I suppose you have known a good many women?"

"Yes. I was married when I was quite young and then divorced. She was a liar, a vain, pretentious, treacherous little liar."

"But I suppose her body was all right?"

"Oh yes, she was beautiful enough. Since then I have loved a good many women. That's one reason why, although I'm a millionaire, they look on me as a crank in England, that and my books. Of course if I hadn't been rich I would have been ostracized, but money has magically changed me into a romantic Don Juan. That's one thing you Bolsheviks forget, the wonderful power of money to create richness of character."

"No, it's the one thing we remember."

"Ah well, maybe. But we were talking of women. They are fundamentally afraid, cowards. That's why they

resort to lying, to vanity, to unscrupulous treachery. They have no pride. And that is their virtue. No proud creature could give itself so entirely as a woman gives herself to a man whom she loves."

"You're successful, then, with women?" John was thinking of Nadya, of what she would say to this man, and his heart beat rapidly with shame.

"Yes, I am successful, because I understand them so well. Neura is a magnificent creature. More of a woman than any one I have ever met."

"Take care. Her father may have been a Central Asian tiger from the mountains. If you come too close she might eat you."

He laughed. "She might eat you, but not me. Tell me, John, is she really your mistress? They all say so. Don't think me impertinent."

"Why should I? Yes, she is."

"And aren't you afraid of being eaten?"

"No. You see, you know a lot about women, but I know something about Neura. And I think she feels that, though I have never told her all I know. She is tender with me as I don't suppose she ever has been or will be with any one else."

Whitehead sighed. It might have been with relief. "Then look out for yourself, my boy. It won't last long. You are only a mood."

"Yes? And what is she? There are two sides to everything."

"I suppose so. We must wait and see."

"I tell you one thing, Whitehead."

"What is that?"

"You think too much of women. You think so much of them that you are not the master man you imagine yourself to be. You're a sensualist."

"Maybe. No doubt you wish to add a petty-bourgeois

philistine also, and a few other choice epithets, as Trotsky did when he wrote about me."

"No. I say nothing. If Trotsky said that, there is no point in my repeating it. He was probably right, so why should I labour the matter?"

"Of course not. Why should you? I am a philistine. I believe the real revolution will come from America, not from Russia, and to say that here is to be a philistine. Very well, I'm content."

"That's where your cigars come from, isn't it?"

"Where?"

"America."

Whitehead got no chance to reply, for at that moment Yasha came in and greeted him.

"You're John's Bolshevik friend?" Whitehead asked.

Yasha admitted the charge with a sly smile.

"Well, I am just being attacked for my love of luxury. You're in time to pick up the bits and hand them over to the Cheka."

Whitehead spoke for a long time, giving them his views on society, on pedagogues, on universities and revolutionaries. "I am neither a Communist nor a Fascist. My proudest achievement is that I have enraged all the parlour revolutionaries in England by shaving Karl Marx. Perhaps you people are right, but I don't believe it. But if so, good luck to you. Yet, frankly, is there more hope for the world to be got out of the masses with their strikes, their machine-smashing devilry, or out of the great capitalists and financiers, holding in their hands the two most powerful instruments in the world for order and creation, industry and finance? I can tell you, after the glimpse that I've had of Bolshevik industry, I have no self-conscious guilt in claiming that there is more hope for the world in the activities of men like myself. We're the real

revolutionaries, the men who will build the international State."

"And 1914?" asked Yasha.

"I expected that taunt. We were caught napping. The old feudal forces of anarchy, the militarists and flag-wavers got in ahead of us."

"Yet I don't think you did so badly out of 1914," Yasha said quietly, "and I never heard of your trying to stop that madness. We armed workers, whom you despise so much, were the people who did that. Moreover, has the world been a haven of peace since 1918? Never in its history has there been such feverish preparation for war. And who profits? Your chemical combine, Whitehead, the aeroplane manufacturers."

"It's true, and it is horrible what you say. Sometimes I despair of humanity. Yet I have faith in my own kind, that we shall get both the soldiers and the dreamers off our backs one day."

Yasha laughed. "No, you won't. Because the soldiers are part of you. You created them with their brutality and their flag-waving. They die when you die, not before. And as for dreamers, which was really the dreamer, Lenin, who overturned the worst tyranny in the world and laid the foundations of Socialism with every man's hand against him, or Henry Ford with his Peace Ark?"

"You know," Whitehead said, cutting the end off another cigar, "I admire you Communists. You have given your lives to a far-off end. In a sense, the revolutionaries are the salt of the earth. Only by such devotion to remote and mighty ends among the young people of today can civilization be saved."

"There speaks the author! Mr. Whitehead, you are the strangest mixture I ever met of an idealist man of letters and a vulgar capitalist. If you lost your money you might even become a Communist! You see all the ills of

society, you sense the remedies, and you shy away like a frightened horse because you have such faith in yourself and your millions, because you seem so wise and educated and the masses of workers so passionate and ignorant. Ah well, wait and see."

Whitehead flushed. He never liked to be told he was wrong. "You Bolsheviks are conceited, and you have far less reason for it than us. We have built up great industries, we have harnessed science for mankind, while you, after a few futile and painful experiments, have the impudence to tell us we are criminals. I suppose we must excuse your youth, but we shall crush you, all the same."

"Now the capitalist speaks. But please, tell me more of your ideas on revolutionaries. What you said just now interests me."

"I'm sorry," said Whitehead, getting up, "but I have to go. I like arguing with you young men, but business calls."

What business was calling at that time of night he did not say. However, they understood perfectly that this was his method of avoiding argument, and they did not mind the implied patronage of his tone, putting it down to national eccentricity.

John did not often see Yasha now, though they lived together, and he felt, he thought he felt, a change in his friend's tone towards him. Somehow Yasha knew that he and Nadya no longer saw one another, and he was emphatic in his dislike of Neura. Up to now they had never quarrelled over her, but it was only by skilfully avoiding, on both sides, any discussion of her relation with John.

That night, however, Yasha, whether because he was tired, or because he was ill, showed that he was irritated by one at least of John's acquaintances, as soon as Whitehead had left them, and John, because his nerves were all worn and jangled by the strain on them, chose to defend

against his friend this man whom he cared nothing about.

"I don't like some of your new friends, Vanya." Yasha grimaced after Whitehead's stolid back.

"Why not? The man's all right if you take him the right way."

"I suppose I don't know the right way then, but his damned airs make me sick. It's as though he were always saying to the world at large, 'I am speaking—Whitehead, the man whose name is known in three continents, listen and be humble, and you shall have an apocalyptic vision of the world!' That may be great, but it's also tiresome nonsense: you're living too much with great men just now, for my fancy."

John chose to flare up and say things he did not mean. "Do you want to pick my friends for me now? I'm tired of a father confessor, Yasha."

Yasha looked at him steadily a moment, as though he were trying to control himself. Then he gave way and at great length told John exactly what he thought of him and his present life. He mentioned Nadya, spoke of her as a fine, honest girl, compared her with what he called the riff-raff of John's present company, and thereby drew from the unhappy boy a wretched accusation, that even in his present mood he repented as soon as uttered.

"You seem very fond of Nadya. Maybe you're interested in that direction, Yasha?"

Yasha blushed, which is a thing a man will only do before a boy on extreme provocation, and seldom from shame. Yasha blushed because he was shaken with sudden anger and contempt. He felt for John's surroundings as he had felt towards bourgeois society before the Revolution, that it was a thing shameful and rotten.

"You young scum, how dare you say a thing like that!" Then more gently, as though he would avoid a break: "Don't you see, Vanya, what you're doing, where you're

going? In a country like ours there are always people such as those you go with floating around a great movement, muck that is washed along when a stream overflows in spring-time. When the stream reaches its level again they are left high and dry, to be gathered by the peasants for firewood." He tried to be calm himself and lit one of his rare cigarettes.

But John was in one of his black, violent moods when the only relief he could get was to reach out and smash the nearest thing. In this case the thing he smashed was his only real friendship, for into his unlucky head there came a fleeting memory of a scene and a suspicion but a few nights before. In a street near the Lubyanka he had seen one night two people come out of a restaurant and walk quickly away. A man and a girl, but in the half-glimpse he had caught from the opening door of the eating-house they had seemed like Yasha and Nadya. It was a foolish, chance shot to fire, but in his present mood he took the first weapon, neither knowing nor caring if it were a fatal one.

"I saw you both the other night near the Lubyanka," he fired at him. "Why have you never told me you were meeting if you had nothing to conceal?"

The look in Yasha's eyes was a strange one, part anger, part contempt, part sorrow. "To conceal! Yes, I had something to conceal, the feeling that girl has for you after the way you've treated her. I do meet her sometimes, to tell her about you, what you are doing, how you look. Does that satisfy you?"

"No, it does not. You meet her to lie to her about me. I swear you say no good of me to her. You cannot, if what you've just said is true, because you think no good of me. You're slandering me to Nadya to get her for yourself, that's all."

Most emphatically it was all. Yasha did not trouble to

answer the monstrous accusation, but put on his outdoor things in silence. When he was ready to go he turned to John, very pale, but his eyes were like polished steel and his look grim.

"When I come back you'll be gone. Do you understand? Gone, bag and baggage. I have a meeting now and won't be back for three hours, you have time to bethink yourself where to go. Three hours, do you hear? Goodbye." And he was gone.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN went. He found shelter in the room of a painter whom he knew, a corner of a tiny place in Brussovsky Pereulok, where he was acutely uncomfortable, partly because of bugs, partly because the painter had troubles of his own which he had never made a habit of keeping to himself.

Now he was more than ever alone, for he had cut himself off from both Yasha and Nadya, a step he bitterly regretted. That he could have put all right he did not doubt, but a cursed pride kept him from going frankly to Yasha, and shame, too, perhaps. Instead he drank with the painter and his friends.

He asked Neura if he might share her room. She laughed outright at him.

"Do you think I want to take you in lawful wedlock?" she asked. "I keep my room to myself, and I share it with no man."

He was desperate and made the mistake of pleading with her.

"Don't play with me, Neurochka, let me come. I'm finished. I can't stick it where I am. Everything's gone but you."

"And am I so precious, then?" She played with him. "That's new to me, indeed, that any man should find me his soul's desire. But it isn't so, Vanka, my boy. I've heard people say things like that before when they've made fools of themselves. You don't want me, you only want something to save your self-respect. No, thank you. I've given men my body for their lust, but never my freedom for their vanity."

He was in a state now when he could argue or plead with no one. He flared up at her, felt that surging black violence in him again.

"You mean you want your room for other men, you damned black whore." And he left her lest he fly at her.

From that moment he became obsessed by the feeling that she was betraying him, making a fool of him, the bigger fool because he cared, unlike the other men she had put on and off like so many dresses. The mocking words of Pavlov came back to him, "so many seconds, minutes, hours and days could never be filled in Neura's life by one man alone." Now when they teased him at the theatre or Neura made one of her outrageous jokes, he no longer rapped back with quicker wit and sharper tongue. Instead, he stayed moodily dumb, or cursed. The others began to shun him, and when Pavlov tried a friendly remonstrance he was forced to shrug his shoulders and walk away with nothing done, with hardly the first words uttered even, so vilely did John meet him.

Once as he turned into Arbat on his way to her flat he ran into Whitehead. The suspicion at once flew into his head that he was coming from Neura's, but the Englishman greeted him so pleasantly, explained so naturally that he was on his way to the British Mission in Vorovskaya, that even John was pacified. Only after he had left him did it cross his mind that he was not on the shortest cut to the Mission, but then he was an Englishman, who

always travelled in sleighs or automobiles, and so would not know the Moscow streets.

Unhappily, when she was with him a few minutes later, she mentioned Whitehead's name, and the flood of suspicion came back with a black rush.

She was scolding him for his ill-temper.

"I can't help it."

"But you're beginning to look a washed-out rag. Why do you drink so much?"

"Because I'm tired. Once I never had to ask myself what I must do, or why I was doing it; I spoke and acted directly, without mooning like a sick girl. I have lost my will all but for one thing."

"What's that?"

"To have you, really, absolutely, to make you want me."

"Hark to the boy. Isn't what you have good enough? You talk like a bourgeois in a book, or my old Andrusha."

"Oh, don't tell me I'm a fool, I know it."

"I'm glad of that, for you're quite right, Vanya. And to be quite frank, I preferred you when you still had your senses. I thought better of you. Whitehead, that fat Englishman, is more of a man than you."

He turned on her. "And you're tired of me? You want a change? A fat Englishman?"

"Not so hot, my friend. I said nothing of the sort. But all the same, I warn you. I'm a free woman and I do as I please."

"Yes, damn you, you do. But don't go too far, Neura. I've made a fool of myself, but I'm not a fool, and I'm not to be pressed too far, not too far." The last words he said dully, almost mechanically, as though they were jerked out by some hidden strength in him, in spite of himself.

She laughed it off, yet for once she seemed sorry to have tormented him, and for an hour was all tenderness. Nevertheless, he left her unsatisfied and wretched. He was tired,

tired, and he wanted to be free, as he had been a year ago, a boy with a strange world in front of him. Winter was wearing away and a sudden nostalgia of the steppe shook him, leaving him weak and weary to death.

As he was putting on his overcoat and goloshes she smiled at him from the divan. "I suppose you want to beat me, as Andrusha did. It isn't any good, my dear, and you had better leave me alone to go my way. You're only making a fool of yourself with passion."

His hand on the door he turned to her. "Beat you? No, I don't want to do that. But don't go too far or I might do worse."

He meant it. She filled his sight now to the utter exclusion of everything else. He hated her and could not be rid of her, while all the time dimly he scented freedom, far away, beyond her. The steppe, the old days with Grisha and Jenny; Californian Pete, who had been burned in the flame of his desire for freedom. Ah, then he had been madly curious of life, stepped into it from the hotel at Vladivostok with the joy of a young colt turned loose on the prairie.

For a week Neura would have nothing to do with him, and all that week he drank with the melancholy painter. The eighth night, a Monday and a holiday, his suspicions became unbearable and he went to the flat in the Arbat. It was not a cold night, the thaw had set in and the keen wind which had blown all day had died. He saw that the sky was clear and that the spring was not far off. Around him the people thronged the pavements, and in a patch of golden light outside the Goskino he watched the young couples go in as Nadya and he had once gone in, and cursed their happiness. Tonight he would finish it and have his freedom back. Crossing the street he went into a café and drank a bottle of Armenian cognac. Whitehead was

there, he knew it, but somehow he was going to be free again.

At the door of the flat he did not give the four rings of the bell which brought her from her room, but waited till the door opened and one of the other occupants came out. He pushed in, muttering "Citizen Gurevich," and though the man made as if to stop him he checked himself and went out, closing the door behind him, leaving John inside.

This was the room, in front of him, a thin light shone under the door, from time to time he heard a soft murmur of voices. He reflected grimly that conversation must be difficult, since Whitehead's Russian was bad and Neura knew no other language.

Gently he tapped on the door. He heard her move and call out impatiently, "Who is it?"

He was an actor, and he changed his voice to call softly.

"Pardon, one moment, Neura Alexandrovna."

There was a short grumble and she was on the other side of the door. He pushed roughly in as she opened, and stood with his back against it.

"What do you want?" she asked angrily.

"First Whitehead, then you."

Whitehead came out from behind a screen, unperturbed, probably not unused to the situation.

"What the hell do you think you're up to, John?" he asked.

John pulled out his revolver. "Get out or I shoot. I want Neura, alone. I've nothing against you, but if you don't go I'll shoot."

Whitehead looked inquiringly at Neura. His bad Russian made speech difficult. "I think the boy's drunk. Shall I go, Neura, or do you want me?"

She looked contemptuously at John. "Better go. I'll deal with him. He won't trouble us again."

Whitehead put on his things. "Don't monkey about with that pistol, John. It's a fool's weapon. I suppose you'll be quite safe, Neura. Good-bye." And he calmly kissed her before he went.

They were alone. He put the pistol in his pocket and faced her.

"Now what do you mean by it?" she asked. "You know this means the end of our affair."

"Yes, the end as it's been up to now. But the beginning as it's going to be."

"Going to be. I'm finished, through, no mistake, my lad." She spoke coldly, sharply, in the vixenish tone she could use.

He staggered forward towards her, his hot eyes on her face, on her heavy rounded limbs, the warm dusky beauty of her. "You mean that." He caught her hand roughly.

She pulled to free herself, but he did not let go.

"Of course I mean it. I've warned you often enough. Let go, you fool." And she struck him hard on the face with her free hand.

The blood rushed to his head. The black wave of violence snatched him up again, and the need to smash, to smash and free himself was choking him. He gripped her and flung her back on the broad divan, and dimly as he did so he remembered her boast that strong though he was, she could kill him. He muttered to himself, "You shan't kill me, you shan't kill me," and as she struggled violently he imagined she was trying to kill him. They made no sound as they fought, but suddenly she was limp in his hands. He did not let go, thinking she was shamming. "Don't fox me," he said, "you've done it once too often, once too often." And then his fingers loosened of themselves and he fell unconscious.

CHAPTER VIII

THE night was not cold and at midnight John was still tramping the streets. He went into one or two cafés that were still open. They reminded him of the Medvied in Vladivostok and he came out disgustedly, his money spent. The air was hot in these cellars, thick with smoke, the men were noisy, the women persistent, and the fumes of cognac turned his stomach.

Under the Chinese Wall the beggars were huddled in their rags. John lay down among them. Near him two men in long khaki coats that reached to their heels were sitting. Over the places where should have been their noses and mouths were white bandages, like the white laugh of a clown's mask, and from beneath the bandages came faint murmurs, little obscene sniggers. The two men understood each other, they made a little commune of their own in the midst of the healthy world. Soon they got up and walked away, tall, menacing, the skirts of the long soldiers' coats flapping about their heels, and as they went they seemed to be communing together beneath the bandages in a horrible sympathy of rottenness.

Their places were taken by a band of children. There were six of them, and two girls in black padded coats, with shawls round their heads. Grey flesh showed through the rags of some of the boys. They laughed and joked, counted out the kopeks they had begged, bragged of the pockets they had picked, of their exploits, and threatened the girls in jocular, childish voices. They, too, were obscene. In a few moments they fell to quarrelling, two boys and one of the girls against the rest. They fought ferociously, without sound, so intently that for the first time in his life John felt afraid as he watched the grey shapes sway in the darkness, heard the thud of the blows, the

tearing of their rags. From nowhere two militia-men came running, and into the darkness the children scattered and disappeared.

"Little devils," grunted one militia-man, lifting his red cap and wiping his brow.

"Drink and drugs make them more like beasts than children," said his comrade. "Look here," and he pointed to the ground.

"Blood," said the first one. "There would have been murder if we hadn't come."

"The sooner they all get killed off, the better, if you ask me. What good will they ever be to Russia? Scum! Ekh, these wandering peasants with their filth and disease!"

The other sighed. "Asia, that's what it is, comrade. The curse of the country is this taint of Asia. These thousands of beggars belong to the past and they should be killed off with it, that's my opinion."

The two strode off, grumbling, taking no notice of John.

The night was starless, blind. Figures appeared from nowhere, disappeared into nothingness. A yard or two away a thin, wretched man came suddenly into sight, saw John, hesitated a moment as though afraid of anything that lived, then stepped forward and sat down by him. He was a grave, yellow-faced, grey-moustached Mongol, with the far-away eyes of a priest or mystic. John remembered seeing him standing at the bottom of Gerzen Street, one pitiful hand held out in supplication, the brown eyes suffering, uncomplaining, dignified. He gave the impression of being dumb. Now he collapsed with a little sigh and John thought he was asleep till he heard a murmur as of prayer coming from the bundle of rags. He thought of Andrusha's lama, wandering over the surface of the earth, from town to town, village to village, tent to tent. "Om

Mané Padmé Hum." Where was Andrusha now? Wandering, too, perhaps, seeking identity with the God he was so sure existed, haunted by the vision of that woman.

Other figures gathered about him from out of the darkness, men blind, men mutilated, Chinamen, Kirghiz, Mongols, Tartars, shadowy figures grumbling and laughing and sinking into silence, becoming mere bundles of stinking rags, hardly visible in the night. John dozed, slept, woke again hours later, so it seemed. It was clearer, there were stars in the sky and a white moon hung low across a bar of grey cloud. Some one was speaking to him.

He looked at his neighbour. He was a bearded, heavy figure in a black cassock, a cross about his neck, a wandering priest or monk.

"The dark people," he was saying. "They are neither Europe nor Asia. Thieves and prostitutes and murderers, disease-eaten beggars and men of God. Here we are, the dark people beneath the Chinese Wall, gathered from every quarter of the great plains, from the Wall of China to the Polish forests."

"Who are you?" John asked.

"A monk. I stand in the Tverskaya with a cross about my neck, holding out my hand for alms. As the bourgeois come out of the great stores they give me their kopeks. Charity eases the conscience. The Christ on my breast heeds them not. Why should He? When His Church was strong they cared for nothing save fatness and ease, now that His Church is broken and His servants scattered, they give their kopeks to me for conscience' sake, and I am happy."

"You have no shame?"

"Who are you to speak of shame beneath the Chinese Wall? Those who lie here have abandoned shame. We live like lice, we irritate the people, but they cannot scratch

us off. Here all are equal, all are rotten, there are no continents, no Europe, no Asia, no lords, no servants."

A voice spoke from somewhere among the huddled shapes.

"We have no shame, but we suffer and the pious are sorry for us."

The monk laughed. "We suffer, some of us. Over there lies a man with no legs and withered arms, who crawls over the snow like an insect in winter, and lies by the roadside shivering and moaning, so wretched that even the lice have deserted him. He gets money, much money, from those who are sorry. Yet no one is really sorry for him, only their hearts are frozen by the thought that humanity can fall so low that it is no longer human, but only an insect. So they give a kopek to warm their hearts again, to set the hot blood flowing once more. We do not suffer. We are only insects."

A voice growled, "Comrades, there is one here calling us insects, and we suffer, we have no shelter, no warmth, we are men and we live in hell, and he insults us. Let us beat him."

There were some curses, and a weary voice called, "Leave us be, it is warm and we want to sleep. Why make a row? The militia will come down and we shall be driven away."

The monk went on, as if to himself. "We are the old world dying and suffering in agony. We have suffered so much that we are no longer human. The old world is dead and we are only lice living on the blood of new life. In time we shall be wiped out."

It was growing light, the huddled shapes were still, and the pale moon was sinking. Not far away John saw the insect, the man with no legs and withered arms, who crawled on his belly to beg for coppers. He shuddered, though the bleared eyes were closed and the tangled beard

hid the inhuman face. Beside him the monk was also sleeping, and before the dawn came, before his terrible neighbours woke to life, John rose and ran, ran with all his strength away from the mediaeval wall, to the wide boulevards and the friendly trees.

He walked down to the river. The sun was rising. It was spring and the song of the birds was clear in the bright air.

Only then did John recall what had happened. Was it last night or two nights ago? He was not clear, he could not remember when he had done it, or if she was dead when he left the room, but only her face, swollen and bruised, the horrible eyes. He shuddered and the vision faded; he was alone, free, life in his hands again to make what he would of it. A tram passed by, full of workers going to their factories. A soldier came out of the Kremlin gate and walked past, humming softly to himself.

Then he had an inspiration. He would write to Andrei Sergeivich and tell him that she was dead, that all was paid for and now they were both free. He walked to the post office at the bottom of the Tverskaya, bought paper, pencil and stamps, and then went back to the garden beneath the Kremlin Wall. He wrote his letter, hardly knowing what was in it, and posted it. He was free, free, he would go back to his room and get his things, go away, somewhere, start all over again, perhaps on the sea.

Of Neura he no longer thought at all. With the posting of the letter she vanished from his mind, absolutely and completely. That he had committed a crime he did not realize, and he walked back towards Brussovsky Pereulok without thinking of danger, still in a dazed dream of freedom. As he turned the corner a man noticed him, a man in a short fur-lined jacket, with a green engineer's cap. He touched John on the shoulder.

"Citizen, your documents, please."

John swung round, stared at him like a man awaking from a long sleep and muttered stupidly, "My documents?"

"Yes," said the other harshly, "your documents. I am a detective of Mur," naming the Moscow C.I.D., "and I am looking for the American citizen Johnson, Ivan Ivanich, is that you?"

"Me?" He fumbled in his coat and produced his tattered card. "Yes, I suppose it's me."

The man glanced at the card and signed to another man who had come up, also in civilian clothes. The two placed themselves on each side of John and waited for an isvoschik. They took the first that passed and drove rapidly to the militia-post in Leontyevsky, quite near by.

At the end of the day he was in prison, and the next morning the first visitor came, Pavlov, the leader of the Blue Blouses.

"A nice mess you're in, my boy," was his greeting. "And a nice mess I'm in, minus two members of the troupe, but we'll let that pass. Only why did you do it? Why didn't you wait? In a few days she would have left us, either with that Englishman or for another job." He rattled on, talking at large to spare John the need for speech. "By the way," he finished, "that Englishman is in a great state. He's been to see me and swears it's his fault, that he ought not to have left you together, that he should have known, and so on."

John laughed, for the first time. "He was so sure. 'Shall I stay and manage the drunken boy for you, my dear?' and when she said 'No,' going off as pleased as punch because that was the end of me so far as Neura was concerned."

Pavlov looked at him queerly. "You're not sorry?"

"Sorry? I don't know. It's done, and I could do nothing else. I'm sorry I ever met her, ever knew her."

"I wonder why you did it?" He was talking more to himself than to John. "I suppose a girl of that kind risked it all her life. If it hadn't been you it would have been some one else."

John smiled. "That's a comforting thought, Nikolai Petrovich. You take life calmly."

"Well," said the other, "I think you're pretty damned cool yourself. However, I don't want to bother you about the affair, you'll get enough of that later. I came to tell you that so far as we are concerned, we'll help you all we can. Neura was a comrade, too, but we all talked it over last night and decided it wasn't for us to judge, that she was dead and you're alive, and that we can make the best of a dirty business by helping the living. So here's my hand, and that's for all of us, all that's left, I mean, and what we can do for you in the trial we will, without reserve, you understand. It's a deal, between comrades. I'm going to a lawyer now."

John took his hand. "Thank you. Good-bye, Nikolai Petrovich."

Pavlov left him. John had always liked him, liked his intelligent, smiling face, the white teeth that flashed under the short, dark moustache, the lively eyes that looked as though they knew a thing or two, but for your sake we'll keep quiet and have a joke instead. John was comforted by his visit, and began to come more absolutely out of his nightmare, back to the reality of his new freedom and its confines between four narrow walls, eight feet this way, twelve that, as he soon discovered.

The next visitors came much later and shook him more. They were Yasha and Nadya. They came in together, unhappily, and it was a long time before any of the three spoke, after the first greeting.

Yasha was the first to speak, rather haltingly, explaining that he took much of the blame for what had

happened, that their quarrel was foolish and would never have happened had he been normal that night.

John interrupted. "If, if, Yasha. But you know that 'if' explains nothing. I did what I've done and I take full responsibility."

Nadya looked at him with something of her old joy in his youth and vitality. "You're right, Vanya. And I'm glad that you say that. But Yasha and I are guilty towards you in one respect, at least." And she blushed.

John looked at her inquiringly, but before he could ask how, Yasha was speaking.

"Yes, let me explain. You know why we quarrelled, Vanya, what you said to me about Nadya. Well, it wasn't true, not a word of it. You had never seen us near the Lubyanka, I had no feelings but friendliness, and though we were meeting from time to time it was only because Nadya wanted to hear about you: but after what you said, I won't say it was because of it," and here the old shrewd smile twitched the corners of his mouth, almost imperceptibly, "after what you said I did begin to think of her differently. When you left we met oftener, and now, only three days ago, I told Nadya that I love her, and she, it appears, thinks not so badly of me. Anyhow, we are going to try married life and see if it suits us. So in that respect, as Nadya says, we are guilty, though unconsciously. Do you forgive us?"

John looked at him, his heart full. Since these last terrible weeks he no longer loved Nadya, only felt for her as a dear friend. As for Yasha, he was his brother.

"Forgive you. As if you need ask! But, Yasha," for he was surprised at the news, and would not accept it at once, "you are married. You have a wife."

It was Yasha's turn to blush. "I had. Only I don't think I will tell that story just yet. I haven't seen her for a long time, two years in fact, and I must confess I didn't ever explain to you quite honestly what our relations had been."

"That's all right. I don't want to know," John assured him, and reflected that for all their friendship Yasha had never once spoken to him of his intimate life, never really hinted who this wife was he never saw.

They talked of John's position, not asking him questions, but taking the past for granted and only seeking how they might better the future.

"I'm only glad that it's all past and finished," John told them. "I feel free, as I have never done for months, and I'm not afraid of what is coming."

"But her," Nadya interjected. "She was a living woman, John, and you killed her." It was the first reference any of them had made to the crime.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "I took her life. Poor, wretched woman, I think perhaps she did not care. We were a pair of vagabonds, and the difference between us was that she didn't care whether she lived or died, and I cared passionately to live. I suppose in that she was better than me."

The warder came in to tell them that the interview must end.

"Before we go," asked Yasha, "is there anything to do?"

"Yes," John answered. "I have been thinking of what is coming since I came to myself, and I suppose that for many years I shall be a prisoner. Write for me to Ilya Fedorich Kireiev and ask him to make application for me to go on his farm in the summer months when the prisoners have their leave. Perhaps they will not let me go so far, but try."

Yasha promised, and they turned to go, but Nadya, looking back, could not repress a cry. "Vanya, you're so young, to be shut up like this, for years. It's horrible."

He did not answer. He wanted to be alone again, to sleep, sleep, to forget if he could and to think. The door closed. . . .

CHAPTER IX

In the Cossack village near Auli Ata, Andrei Sergeivich received John's letter, the strange, half-mad effusion he had written the morning after the crime. Since Yasha and John had left him he had changed, grown to look old, become more completely silent and misanthropic than before. Sometimes Ilya Fedorich came upon him praying, ardently, feverishly, as though his soul sought freedom in the words. At times he stood apart, a far-away look in his eyes, like a man who has sought salvation and sees it near.

When John's letter came he read it through, twice, then put a match to the paper and watched it burn to ashes. These he reduced to dust with the heel of his boot and, having completed the destruction, he knelt to pray, crossing himself twice. He prayed silently, or any one overhearing the substance of his prayer would have called him mad.

His prayer was of joy and thanksgiving to the universal God that the past was dead and crushed in the ashes of that letter, that the last burden had been lifted from him and the moment of liberation and reunion was near. When he had finished he whistled to his horse standing by, and mounting her rode away to the south.

Kireiev, who had been out on the pastures, saw him and called out; then, as he did not answer, galloped to intercept him.

"Hey, Andrusha!" he called. "I want to talk with you."

Andrei Sergeivich pulled in his mare and waited for him.

"What is it?" he asked.

The burly old Cossack galloped up and dismounted. "Get down, Andrusha, for the love of God. I want to ask your advice about this new tax." He was referring to

a new surtax on private trading which had struck shrewdly at his trade with the Kirghiz.

Andrusha dismounted. "Pay it," he told him.

The old Cossack flushed and pushed his chubby brown hand over his perspiring forehead. "Pay it. Pay be damned. It's robbery."

"This is a robber's age," the other said calmly. "Pay or go to jail."

Kireiev swore with greater vigour and directness. "I can chuck it. Let their damned Co-operatives do the business, and I'll go back to real farming." He went on angrily and desperately: "They are making it impossible for me to trade any longer, Andrusha. What is the good of my trying? There are so many rules, that even I can't afford to bribe enough officials to make myself secure. 'Free trading,' they call it!" He laughed, a hoarse, grim little laugh. "Free to trade so long as you hand over all your profits to their Bolshevik State."

Andrusha shrugged his shoulders. "You must remember that it is now a Workers' and Peasants' State, Ilyusha. There is no room for us."

"Ah, it's all very well for you, with your hopelessness. You don't care. But am I not a peasant? Haven't I worked all my life with my hands, tearing a living out of this damnable steppe? Haven't I slaved in the freezing winter, during the hot summer, when the last blade of grass was burned to straw by the sun? I'm a Cossack, as much a peasant as any one of them, and they shan't down me. Not while I live."

"And what do you propose to do about it? Go and pray at Lenin's tomb for a change of heart in the Bolsheviks?"

"Pray? Pray be damned! I'll work as I've worked all my life. I'll show them yet that I can prosper, that they can't beat me. For all their taxes and their laws, I have a lot of money saved, and I'll go north, back to the Volga, to

the black earth. I'll take land, I'll start a Co-operative and buy tractors. I'll make a farm that my children can live on, where they can bring their wives and husbands and prosper on the fruits of my labour. They can't beat me. I am a Russian. I am Russia. Come with me, Andrusha, back to Saratov Province where the land is good, and we'll make a farm that all the Bolsheviks will come and stare at till the eyes drop out of their heads with envy."

Andrusha stirred impatiently. "Don't be a fool. Do you think that in time they won't take that, too? If they won't let you live by cheating the Kirghiz, as soon as they can afford to they will see that you don't live by the labour of the muzhiks, or that the land you cultivate with your children doesn't get in the way of their poor peasants. Don't you see that they want you to grow rich, that they want you to employ workers? Then they will say, 'There are classes in the village. We must support the labourers against the rich farmers.' As soon as they have built enough factories and railways, they will turn to the countryside, and make a factory of that also, just as it is in America. Believe me, you might as well starve here as see your last effort broken in your hands when you are an old man."

Kireiev listened impatiently, his brick-red forehead glistening with sweat, as it always did when he was troubled. He raised his hand, the little hand on the enormous hairy wrist. "You're an officer, a bourgeois, Andrusha. You haven't the guts to fight them. Your kind were bound to die out, for you never learned to work. But I shall win. Let them make a factory of the countryside. I will manage it. It will be mine. The peasants will rule Russia yet, and it may be we shall make Russia into another America, but we shall be its rulers."

Andrusha got up. "Well, go back to Saratov, Ilyusha.

Perhaps you are right. Certainly my kind are finished, and I shall not go with you."

Their horses were standing near, cropping the fresh spring grass of the steppe. Andrusha went to his mare and put one hand on her bridle. "They call you Dilki, the fox, out here on the steppe, but if you go back north you will find cleverer foxes, Communist ones. Go and God be with you, but go without me." He mounted. "I am going for a ride before I come in."

"Don't be late," Kireiev grumbled, as he limped towards his own horse. "I want to talk to you again about this."

Andrusha cantered off, to the south, towards the violet hills on the horizon. It was spring and the steppe was a carpet of flowers. The perfume of the spring choked him as he rode, filling his eyes with tears, bitter-sweet in his mouth. He could feel the hard shape of the revolver on his thigh and it seemed to menace him, so that he pushed his horse to a gallop, as though to escape it, and felt it only the more, as he had felt it for two weeks past.

He thought of Natasha as he rode, and now he seemed almost to feel her beside him. She had been his only real life, this spring was false, those gay tulips scentless and mocking. He remembered her one afternoon, an autumn afternoon, in that little room at the top of the apartment-house in Samara. Outside a damp and bitter wind was whirling a few yellow leaves down the desolate, dirty street, driving cold, stinging showers of rain against the walls and windows of the houses. "Do you remember that verse of the French poet?" she had said. " 'Il pleure dans mon cœur comme il pleut sur la ville.' I think spring will never come."

The afternoon sun was bright. The steppe was alive with spring, but in his heart only tears, like autumn rain, cold, hopeless, futile. Old Kireiev was right. His kind were finished. The mare galloped with a swift, easy mo-

tion, the gladness of the air in her heart, the wild spring of the steppe in her blood.

Andrusha dropped the reins on to her neck, let her have her head. His eyes were fixed on the distant hills, his heart was full of her, of Natasha. She enveloped him, stole softly over him, was his. His at last, his beloved! Dark Neura, the flat-faced, yellow Kirghiz girls came to his mind for a brief second and disappeared as quickly. She had him all now. "Natasha, Natasha. Il pleure dans mon cœur comme il pleut sur la ville." Against his thigh the hard steel. The tears were warm now, warm rain, spring rain. Against his temple the cold steel. In the distance the violet hills. He pulled the trigger. Free, the frightened mare galloped madly on, over the singing steppe, away from the huddled body lying among the crushed red tulips. . . .

CHAPTER X

JOHN'S trial created a mild sensation in Moscow, winning quite a big headline in the *Vechernaya Moskva,* and much interest among certain intellectual and semi-bourgeois circles. The correspondent of a London paper wired the story home as an example of the depraved morals of the Russian revolutionary youth, but the American journalists, because of his birth, would not touch it and contented themselves with seats in the court-room. The fact of Whitehead being mixed up in the affair gave it spice for their ears.

The big room of the Moscow Gubsud on the Tverskaya boulevard was quite full when the guards brought him in. While they waited for the court to enter he scanned the spectators' faces, saw Nadya, Yasha, Pavlov, Whitehead and many others whom he knew, grave, curious and

friendly. The white room with its scarlet banners of the working-class impressed him, but with a kind of humility that was neither respect, nor fear, nor guilt.

There was a stir, the khaki-clad soldiers came to attention, the people rose, as the president and his two assessors came in and took their seats on the dais. They settled again, the prosecutor stood up and the case was opened. At first John listened attentively to him, noting his neat dress, his short, well-trimmed beard, his swift gesticulation, the ironic note that inevitably creeps into the accuser's voice. One of the guards had given him pencil and paper, but he made no notes, and soon tired of hearing what he knew already being made foolish by this man who did not understand. However, the prosecutor was brief, his few witnesses even briefer, and John had no questions to ask, for they each gave their little glimpse of him on the night of the tragedy with some accuracy and no malice. It amused him to hear these people retailing commonplace little incidents which he himself had quite forgotten, or never noticed in his madness. Ordinary little things they had seen and none of them guessed at the time that they all fitted into this mad tragedy. Even Whitehead seemed astonished as he gave his tale, not quite truthfully in every detail.

He heard the president speaking to him, asking him one or two questions with regard to the witnesses who had just finished. He examined this man who was to judge him. A high forehead, rather severe, a brown moustache and beard trimmed to a point, his voice kindly and his eyes searching. Perhaps he might understand, though it hardly mattered, the thing was done, clear to all, and the sooner this trial with its peering eyes and probing speech was over, the better. On either side the president sat the two assessors, on his left a woman, on his right an oldish man, but at the moment he did not notice them. The

old terrible feeling of unreality came back, the stupor that possessed him before and after the crime. He felt people looking at him queerly, that they were waiting for something, nudging one another and whispering. Then the guard bent down to him and he understood he was being called on for his defence, but when he stood up all he had planned to say disappeared. He could only stutter a few sentences and sit down.

The president bent towards him.

"Don't be afraid," he was saying. "This is a court of justice, but you are not in America now. We have heard the people's prosecutor, and he has given the story of this crime, from the outside. We know you accept that, as we do, but it isn't the whole story. We want now to hear the inside, what made you do this, speak as you like, begin at the beginning, and let us have the truth as you see it. No one here is your enemy."

John realized that he was speaking thus because of pity for his youth, the youth that was going to be shut up in a prison for years; how many? for ten, maybe. And a wave of self-pity rushed over him at those words. Well, he would tell them, tell these three how it happened.

He told them all his story, of how he came to Vladivostok, of his journey through Siberia, and his meeting with Yasha. Then at length he described Andrei Sergeivich and the miserable affair of Neura on the island and in the Cossack village.

"No one here has heard her story," he told them, "but Comrade Schumann, who will give evidence for me, can corroborate because he also heard the story from the lips of Ilya Fedorich Kireiev, the Cossack and friend of Andrei Sergeivich." Then he passed lightly over the time with the Quakers, barely mentioning that he met there a young Russian girl, a Komsomolka, whom he loved and with whom he came to Moscow.

After that his tale came out mechanically, sometimes stumbling and halting, then helped out by the president's questions, till it flowed on again. He hardly thought of what he was saying. At first he fixed his eyes on the large photograph of Lenin above the president's head; then they passed to the woman assessor. She was a factory worker, middle-aged, with a broad wrinkled face, her hair bound in a red handkerchief. He could see her listening intently as his miserable tale came out, and for the first time shame filled him. If he had had a life of hard toil like hers it would not have happened. He could almost see the thought shaping in her mind as it came into his.

His glance passed to the other assessor. He was an oldish man, an intellectual, a shabby khaki tunic buttoned up to his neck, his head thrown back, a fine, kindly head, short-sighted blue eyes, a big grey moustache over the sensitive mouth, a mane of silver-grey hair over the wrinkled, puzzled brow. He was trying to follow, to see if ever he could have done the same as this boy, recalling his life spent in prison and in exile, of his rare and busy freedom that was as hard as exile, so taken up with doctoring the sick, with conspiring, organizing, fighting. He had the saddest, tenderest face of all, more even than the woman's, but life had forged him a soul of steel.

As John drew to an end, as he watched these three silently absorbing his story, his first feeling of humility returned. Before these people he felt profoundly humble, and his strongest impulse was to ask their pardon for his crime, not their mercy but their forgiveness. He had finished. He sat down exhausted, knowing they had not understood, but glad that he had spoken, revealed his baseness to their judgment.

Pavlov spoke for him next, then Yasha, and as his friend came forward John sat forward to listen. He heard him tell how he owed his life to the incident at Tientsin, and

noticed that on all three of his judges the effect was good. His other evidence was general, that of a friend. Before he stood down he begged the court to bear in mind John's youth and that he, Yasha, had failed in his duty to him by turning him out at a critical moment.

The prosecutor was on his feet again, speaking of the deplorable looseness of certain sections of the youth, of an epidemic of violence that for the honour of the Republic should be sternly suppressed. He admitted that the woman Neura Gurevich had evidently seduced the accused, that she had treated him abominably, but that in itself could be made no excuse for a crime of violence. The first phase of the revolution, the defeat of the bourgeoisie in arms, was over. But a second and more remorseless struggle faced them now, the defeat of bourgeois idealism, of bourgeois ethics that threatened the very heart of the new society. A woman was no man's chattel. Her life was her own, however misguided. He demanded a severe penalty, after taking all favourable circumstances into consideration, the prisoner's youth, the fact that he was drunk and hardly responsible for his actions, the provocation he had received. He asked the court to pass sentence of eight years' imprisonment with loss of Civil rights.

John sighed. He had done his worst. It would soon be over. The court retired, and when they were in their places again for sentence he noticed Nadya huddled up close to Yasha, pale and weeping quietly. The sight of her tears affected him so that he hardly heard the president's even voice giving the sentence—five years' imprisonment and loss of Civil rights—and the hardest part of it all was that he could not call to her to stop, tell her that all was well, that he was himself again and did not care. . . .

John went to the very prison he had visited with Whitehead, and, though he did not, as Shurin had done, go into hospital until he was used to the confinement, he found the

first weeks bitter enough. Just over half the prisoners were peasants, men of slow speech and few words, while of the whole number a fair sprinkling had not their full share of men's wits. Others were pleasant and interesting enough, and he lived in his cell on the second tier with the conductor of the prison balalaika orchestra, an officer who had deserted from the army, been condemned to death and reprieved. Of his desertion he was bitterly ashamed and often enough would bemoan his cowardice till far into the night. Happily he spent much of his time writing music for his orchestra, of which John was a member, and so did not become unbearable through self-pity.

Shurin he found to be now quite happy. He was instructor of a miniature engineering shop, and had a tiny drawing-office all of his own where he made wonderful blue prints of strange machines that were to make the Republic the greatest in the world and bring him fame beyond all counting. But he could not tolerate the commandant, who had not the same confidence in his inventions.

"That man," he would tell John, "is an ignorant brute, a mere Chekist" (that was now his supreme word of contempt). "But for such bureaucrats the Republic would be a tolerable place."

He was interested in the events which had brought John back to his side, and stoutly refused to believe that Whitehead had been intimate with Neura.

"A boy such as you, Vanya, cannot understand men who live on the heights. True, I have heard that his private life is free from the shackles of convention, but that he could have been such a vulgar sensualist as you suggest is quite impossible."

John grinned. "It's true that at the trial he denied anything but the purest friendship with her. Indeed, I think he was the only one in all that trial who didn't tell what he

conceived to be the truth. Perhaps it's the legal custom in England. I don't think he thought much of the court."

They were strolling on the yellow patch of exercise ground, under the first hot sun of summer.

Shurin chose to lecture him. "The trouble with you, Vanya, is that you have no respect for others, and so have no self-respect. You never respected me, though I am your elder and in a sense your father, and I am also an educated man. If you had not run away in that mad passion at Vladivostok you wouldn't be here now."

At other times he would grumble against the injustice of life. "I am an innocent man, here because of the envy and spite of lesser men, and I am imprisoned for seven years. You confess openly that you have taken life and you are here for only five years. Which of us can best spare those years, you who are only a boy, or I who can see nothing in the future but the decay of my few remaining years?"

John was not the only murderer in the jail, and he often recalled the shock during his visit with Whitehead when he heard the kindly German in the weaving-shed avow his crime. He imagined visitors in the future, fat Englishmen from the Parliament, or German professors, asking him the same question as Whitehead had asked the weaver, and he thought grimly of the horror on their smug faces at the reply.

Occasionally, when working outside the prison on the edge of the plain, he would be seized with a violent desire for space and freedom, and wonder if he could survive till the time came for the holiday on Kireiev's farm. Back in his cell, while the deserter scribbled his notes on the sheets of paper, he reflected on the strange fate that had once more brought Shurin and himself beneath the same roof.

Both of them had fled from the thing they hated, and both had met disaster where they looked for new life. His mind went back to America, to the murder of Pete Mason which had first broken him away from the life of that country. It had seemed a horrible thing to think of Pete a shapeless charred lump through the brutal cruelty of men, yet he himself had taken a life, and changed lovely limbs to lifeless clay. There in the bitterness of the prison he had his first glimpse of wisdom's sad face. He realized that with each friend and enemy that dies there goes into the grave something of oneself also. All the confined and violent youth in him revolted at the slow decay of life.

Then, when his thoughts became almost unbearable, when the sight of the deserter making his melodies on those endless sheets of grey paper threatened to drive him mad, he remembered something the priest had said in Pavlovka—"Life was storming heaven," wasn't that it?

"Porfiry Alexandrovich," he said to his companion, "do you believe in our Workers' and Peasants' Republic?"

"Yes," said the other, looking up for a second to see if he were serious.

"Then why are we here?" asked John.

"Because we have not believed strongly enough, Ivan Ivanich. We are those with rotten souls who could not have strong faith."

"Have you read Marx?"

"Of course. I was once a candidate for the Party."

"Is it true that somewhere he says the Communists are storming heaven?"

"Yes, he says something like that."

"So, as you might say, we are those who have been beaten in the attack?"

"I can only speak for myself, Ivan Ivanich, and I am a coward."

"And I," reflected John, "am the son of my parents.

English sailor and island woman, your madness has done pretty well for me! What chance did I have?"

The other was collecting his sheets, humming to himself. "'Storming Heaven,' Ivan Ivanich, that would be a fine theme for a symphony; when I write music I am not a coward at all. Only it happens that my music is no good."

There was silence in the little cell. John was thinking of the years in front, and then farther, much farther. When he was free Yasha and Nadya would have children. The image of the sea came to him, great shining plains of bitter salt water, dark in the night, jewelled blue under the sun, tormented and furious beneath the winds. Ships, the desire to feel his body free on board a ship, his muscles and brain fighting with the sea. He fell asleep on his bed. The deserter put his sheets of music carefully away, sighed, whistled a soft bar or two, and got into bed. The light went out.

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